



# DR. EDUARD BENES

*by*

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## DR. EDUARD BENES : THE BACKGROUND

EUROPE has just witnessed one more of the tragedies which history produces so lavishly on the world's stage, with all the elements of pity and terror that the greatest of dramatists might have demanded, and as the curtain goes down on the dignified exit of its central figure we are tempted to murmur, "Here cracks a noble heart. . . ."

Yet even as we do so, we are surprised at finding ourselves paying the tribute to one of the least romantic, least showy of national heroes. For the whole personality and life history of Benes had developed on common-sense lines, without a trait susceptible of appealing to the imagination, but with a logic and steady consistency which compel admiration. We know so little about Benes, and the race from which he sprang, and before we can form any adequate picture of the man, we must know something about his people and their history; far too little is known about them outside Central Europe.

Dr. Eduard Benes was a typical Czech. The



Czechs are a peasant people, with all the virtues and all the vices of the peasant. Masaryk, the great hero of the new Czechoslovak State, the President-Liberator as he was later called, once stated, "There is hardly one of us (*i.e.*, the Czechs) who was not born in a peasant's hut, and if not he, then his father was." They are an unprepossessing and stolid race, stubborn, hardworking, reliable and mistrustful; one must get to know them thoroughly before being able to appreciate them thoroughly. Unlike the Poles and the Hungarians they do not fascinate the casual visitor by the brilliance of their conversation, or the lavishness of their hospitality. An intimate acquaintance with them, however, brings out their solid worth and sterling qualities.

Through the many centuries of their history, ever since their legendary saint and hero, 'Good King Wenceslas,' led forth their hosts against the Teuton, runs the antagonism between them and the Germans—an antagonism born of conflicting economic and political interests, rather than one of character, as in the case of the natural antagonism between the Germans and the French. For comparatively long periods in the history of Bohemia this antagonism has even lain dormant, though it has never died completely out, even for a short season. In character, the

Czechs resemble the Germans. They have the same qualities of energy, organisation and love of hard work which distinguish the Germans, and they have, in fact, been described as "The Germans of the Slavs." And Masaryk himself declared that "No other nation has a temperament so similar to that of the Germans as have the Czechs." To explain this apparent paradox, we must glance rapidly through their history.

When modern Czechoslovakia was created in 1918, the historic State of Bohemia became independent once more after four hundred years under the Hapsburg yoke. But the Czechs have remained firmly seated in their little nest in the centre of Europe for far longer than that. It was in the early beginnings of the history of Europe that the Slavs swept in from the East and settled down under the protection of the Sudeten mountains, which curve round in an arch to form one of the few frontiers in Europe which may truly be described as 'natural'—"a fortress made by God," as Bismarck declared it to be.

The Slavs did not even stop at this mountain-barrier, but crossed over it into what is now known as Prussia where they gradually came under Teutonic domination, leading to the ironical result that one of the most Slav regions of Europe came to take the initiative

in the unification of modern Germany. Even now there are tracts in Prussia—particularly in East Prussia—where the Slav language and customs are still kept alive : and among the names of the haughty Prussian Junkers, as well as in many place-names, this Slav root is easily to be traced. On the other hand, the Sudeten Germans on the Bohemian side of the mountains are by no means racially pure, though by now entirely German in culture, outlook, and inclination of feeling.

Against this shifting racial background, the history of Bohemia ran its troubled and contrasted course—a history for ever to be complicated by the fact that language frontiers and natural frontiers gradually ceased to coincide. This fact must never be lost sight of by anyone who would form for himself any consistent view of the historical development of the peoples of Bohemia.

For ten centuries the pressure of the Germans has been inexorably driving back the Slavs step by step towards the East. Of all the Slav peoples borne down by this eastward-sweeping tide of the Teutons, it is perhaps the Czechs who put up the most courageous and stubborn resistance. A glance at a map will show a Slav enclave wedged in between vast expanses of Germanic territories. The resistance seems at first sight to be religious in

origin and spirit, but this is a very superficial conclusion. The Czechs in the eighth and early ninth centuries refused Christianity when it was brought to them by the Germans, but accepted it, towards the end of the ninth, at the hands of the Moravians. Again, one of the few Czech names familiar to most people is that of John Huss, disciple and follower of John Wyclif, but the nature of the revolt he fanned into being is widely misunderstood. The Hussite movement was, in the first place, a national one. Huss was the son of well-to-do Czech peasants, and he preached to the Czech people in the Czech language. The campaign which had started as a fervent religious movement soon became the rallying point for all those elements which felt a growing restlessness and discontent with the rapidly spreading domination of German influence in the then but recently (1348) founded Caroline University of Prague, as well as in the high offices of Church and State. Huss fell in his unequal struggle against the princes of the Roman Church. He was burned at the stake, but the spirit of his revolution arose Phoenix-like from the martyr's ashes, and Zizka, the blind leader, organised a horde of unarmed and untrained peasants into an army that spread alarm among the mighty of Europe. They drove back the trained forces joined against them in

a crusade launched by the Pope himself. They swept victoriously through southern Germany—and then went back to their Bohemian home. They had no desire to annex the territory of another nation. This is perhaps the proudest moment in the history of an independent but not ambitious nation. Another people in their place might have been lured on to conquests and self-aggrandisement—they had fought only to assert their national liberty, and their right to live according to the creed of their choice. That democratic spirit, which, from the first, pervaded Czech national life, has persisted, through all vicissitudes, down to the present day.

In 1520, by their choice of a king, the Czechs put themselves voluntarily under the domination of the Hapsburgs, which led to a great diminution of their liberties, and the whole of their subsequent history is the record of a desperate but persistent struggle, save for one calm interlude in the seventeenth century, to maintain their distinct national character, language and democratic ideals, in the paralysing embrace of the Austrian octopus. The Hapsburgs were, of course, zealous Roman Catholics and felt it one of their first duties to eradicate the Hussite heresy. The Czechs' attempts at armed resistance were dealt their death blow at the famous battle of Bila Hora (The White

Mountain), on 8th November, 1620. But the blow was dealt at Protestantism and not at Czech nationalism. The treaties of Westphalia made Catholicism supreme, but left the Czech language and Czech political autonomy untouched. For a hundred years the seeds of hatred lay dormant. The Hapsburgs until the reign of Maria Theresa were studiously careful to avoid offending Czech national susceptibilities, and even on occasion demonstratively favoured the Czech language. But a more subtle attack on Czech national independence was going on the whole time, in the ranks of the Czechs themselves—what the great French scholar, Denis, calls “The voluntary abdication” of the Czech aristocracy, who sought to gain influence and power by speaking the language of the court.

In the early nineteenth century Czech national feeling began, from an instinct of self-preservation, to reassert itself, but came up against the full force of the newly-arisen Austrian absolutism. It was the age of Pilacky, the great Czech historian; Jungmann, the celebrated philologist; Halicek, the brilliant journalist; Kollar, the national poet, all of whom worked in the new revival on literary, cultural and historical lines. The movement was countered by every conceivable repressive measure, and that in spite of the significant

fact that the Czechs alone were prepared wholeheartedly to support Austria in her stand against Bismarck's advance. Czech endeavours to achieve for themselves some kind of autonomy within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were not regarded altogether unfavourably at the court at Vienna, but the opposition to any such plan, on the part of the Sudeten Germans, was too noisy and adroit. Direct attacks were made on the Czech language, and demonstrations, which developed into riots, in the streets of Prague, in 1848, to support the demand for equal rights for the Czech tongue were brutally and bloodily suppressed. Gradually Czechs came to the conclusion that their only hope of national freedom lay in throwing off German bonds altogether. The Great War gave them an unequalled opportunity, which was first seized upon haphazardly, with no definite plan in view, until the great Czech leaders, Masaryk and Benes, began to canalise disjointed activities, awake the world to a knowledge of the Czech nation and its special situation and problems, and to pave the way for the creation of a new Czech State on the ruins of an overthrown Austria-Hungary.

Such then is the people from which sprang Eduard Benes, Masaryk's greatest friend, the man of whom he said, "I can tell you, without

Benes we should not have had our revolution," one of the soundest politicians in Europe. Not long ago, a Czech journalist, asked if he knew any typical anecdotes about Benes, replied, "I know none: he is not the kind of man about whom anecdotes are told." Many are the tales told about the statesmen of Hungary; their lunches, brilliant parties and gay social life provide ample material. But Benes is like the rest of his fellow peasant statesmen: his mornings are spent in his office, then he goes to a very modest lunch—rice and macaroni are his favourite foods—and returns to his work until late in the evening. He has very little time for and takes no pleasure in entertaining, although he is always ready to meet anyone, especially anyone he thinks can tell him something—he is always eager to acquire new facts. This lack of the social graces has, perhaps, often worked out to the disadvantage of the Czechs; the foreign diplomats found the company and houses of the aristocratic and wealthy German families more entertaining. But those who wished to get to the bottom of things, who wished to hear solid facts, supported by solid and reasonable argument, went to Benes. His pleasures, too, are simple pleasures. He plays tennis well and is very fond of walking. He can ski, and attempted to learn golf, although he never got on very well



with this sport—perhaps it was too far from the peasant for him! As a boy he was an enthusiastic footballer—but more of that in its proper place. His wife, too, was the right kind of wife for such a man. The old saying goes, “The good wife is the one you don’t hear about”; Mrs. Benes, then, is a superlatively good wife; you never hear about her. She was never, even after Benes himself came into the limelight, the ‘Wife of the President,’ the ‘Lady at the Castle’—she was always plain Mrs. Benes. She was a remarkably clever and efficient woman, but she refused to put herself forward. She kept her accomplishments for her husband and he never failed to consult her and take her advice in difficulties. She was, with Masaryk, the only person with whom he was on terms of friendly intimacy.

## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOLDAYS

EDUARD BENES was born at Kozlany on 28th May, 1884. Kozlany is a small and quite unimportant country town some 150 miles from Prague, in the heart of that part of Czechoslovakia which the Czechs refer to as the ‘Historic Lands.’ On the whole, Bohemia

is a wonderfully beautiful country, but it contains also wild and desolate regions where even now, for example, no railways have been built. Kozlany lies in one of these regions. The soil is poor, the scenery uninteresting, and the countryside is cultivated by smallholding peasants. These peasants are shut off from the outside world, conservative, nationalistic and Catholic to the backbone. Until quite recently the whole district was in the hands of great noble families—Fürstenberg von Pürglitz, the Counts Nostitz, the Metternichs. Not much was left for the peasants, who emigrated to America in large numbers. This countryside had been the home of Eduard's ancestors for many generations. They were peasants of peasants. Eduard's father, Matej Benes, was not himself a native of Kozlany, but of Slowice, a village about an hour's walk from Kozlany. Here the Benes family was well known and widespread, owning three large farms. Matej Benes' father, however, married a second time, and the second wife refused to take any interest in the children of the first marriage. Matej, feeling himself very much in the way at home, left it at the age of twenty-one. He did not wander far. At Kozlany he found an uncle with a marriageable daughter, Anna, who was on the point of becoming engaged to a German peasant from a neighbouring village. Matej

persuaded Anna to give up the German and marry him, and received with her as dowry a small house and a few acres of land. Here he settled down, and his wife bore him ten children, two of whom, however, died in infancy. Eduard was the youngest.

Benes' childhood was a hard one, of which he himself can find little good to say. His father was a peasant of the old type, strict, serious-minded, preoccupied with his hard struggle to earn the daily bread for himself and his family. At home he rarely spoke, only in the village inn did he very occasionally join in conversation. Both he and his wife were strict Roman Catholics, and nothing made him more angry than the failure of one of his children to be in time for family prayer or for church on Sunday. Eduard relates in his memoirs how, during Lent, he enraged his father by making mistakes in repeating the litany. And yet Matej Benes was more enterprising than his neighbours; he created some stir among them by going in for modern methods of cultivation, and modern agricultural machinery, with the result that he always had the best crops of any round about. His energy and success in farming enabled him to send three of his children to study in Prague. But all this was done by not only working hard himself; but by keeping his children at it,

too. Young Eduard had little time for play. He had to be in the fields weeding, hoeing, helping with the harvest. Treats were few and far between, as when his parents took him with them to Slowice for a church festival, though here, on one occasion, his pleasure was marred by his grandfather, crotchety and blind, who screamed at him for not kissing his hand immediately. As a great reward, if he had been very, very good, he was allowed to go to Pilsen to market with his father. But that was all. Of the outside world, and of Prague, they talked only when Vaclav came to stay with them in the country for his holidays. For Vaclav was now an expert in rural economy—although his father had originally intended him for the priesthood—at a school in Prague, and no teacher ever had a more willing pupil than Vaclav found in his father. Vaclav died in 1909, not before he had made himself a figure of note in Czech public life.

The only education that Eduard had received up to his twelfth year was that of the village school, where most of the emphasis was laid on the religious side. The village priest took up most of the time there with confessions and catechisms. But the atmosphere of the Benes home was one of hard work, ambition and study, and Eduard aroused his father's interest in his intellectual capacities

when he was ten by writing his first poem. It was an ode written in honour of the great Czech leader, John Huss, who appealed to his imagination as a symbol of Czech intellectual keenness and Czech aspirations. It is interesting to see this young Czech boy, a Roman Catholic, brought up in a completely Catholic atmosphere, writing his first literary attempt to the glory of a Protestant hero. The poem, as a poem, is certainly no product of precocious literary genius. Eduard was never to develop into a *literary* genius anyhow, although the volume and quality of his works is great indeed; their value lies in a direction other than the literary. But the lines aroused his father's interest and led him to lend a sympathetic ear to Vaclav when, in 1896, he advised that Eduard be sent to study in Prague along with his elder brother Vojtech. Money was as usual very short, but Matej decided that his sons should have their chance, and Vojtech, too, without rising to the heights reached by Eduard, became prominent in the Czech national life and did a great deal for his country during the war. After 1918 he became an Inspector of Schools, a Member of Parliament, and finally a Senator.

Eduard was at first to have studied in a technical arts school. He was to have had a technical training. He passed his examination

brilliantly, but unfortunately the school could not take him in because it was overcrowded. Eduard, therefore, was sent instead to a classical school, 'The Imperial and Royal Gymnasium,' at Vinohrady, a suburb of Prague. When Eduard entered the school, he was a wilful, but self-possessed boy, with an active and systematic mind, unimaginative, profoundly tenacious, and intolerant of repression. He was not a brilliant scholar, but he plodded away at the school curriculum, and devoted a great deal of time to the subjects that interested him. One of the subjects that absorbed him was national history; it awakened in him an intense desire to serve his country, to promote its greatness, and to defend it against its arch-enemy—Germany. For, as he himself formulated it at a later period, the whole activity of this 'brutal and characteristic' nation had for ever been directed towards the destruction of the Slav peoples. And this dread of a powerful and ruthless adversary threw the shadow over the whole of his life and determined his political attitude.

He was hardly happy at school. At first he was too thrilled by the opportunities of study and reading suddenly put in his way to feel any disadvantages, but gradually his obligatory studies became more and more

boring to him and his work deteriorated. He failed to get on with his fellow-students, too, and had frequent quarrels with them. Others he tolerated, because they took private lessons with him, and enabled him to pay his school fees each month. This was necessary, as supplies from home gradually diminished until finally they stopped entirely, when his father gave each of the children who had no means of earning a livelihood his share of the family property. Unfortunately he quarrelled not only with his pupils, but also with his teachers. We hear of him doing his Latin with the aid of 'cribs' under the lid of his desk. He was at daggers drawn with his Czech teacher, and he riled the priest who taught them the catechism by making ironical remarks during his lessons. This, of course, had bad results for him. Joking about religion was a dangerous form of amusement, and Benes' 'note' on his behaviour became worse and worse. In his memoirs, Benes tells us, remembering himself as a schoolboy, that he was unemotional, inclined to rationalism and materialism, averse from religion, although brought up in a strictly religious home; he inclined to socialism, as belonging to the poor class of a district where vast estates were owned by a few powerful families, and princely parks took up the land that might have been cultivated

by the peasantry. He had not, in those days, come under the influence of Masaryk : indeed, he says he was repelled by his teachings. Later, as his mind matured, and his own life evolved on undreamt-of lines, his whole attitude was modified, especially in respect of Masaryk, who was to become his guide, philosopher and friend. But as a schoolboy he was distinctly 'difficult,' impatient of authority, always in revolt against his masters, and, towards the end, careless of his work, which had ceased to interest him.

Two other interests claimed his attention at this period. One was only a short-lived experiment. It taught him that he was no 'ladies' man.' He had decided, deliberately, that he ought to cultivate the fair sex, as a necessary experience in life, and one that he hoped would enable him to find some outlet from the increasing boredom of his work. As a first step he enrolled in a dance class in a Prague suburb, and attended the courses for three weeks. The trial was a short one. Benes found he was no great exponent of the gentle art of flirting. His upbringing and outlook had not lent him any superficial charm, and the young girls did not find his company attractive or amusing. Characteristically he recognised his failure at once. The course was costing him a great deal of money he could ill afford. He had to see



about earning money, not spending it. He dropped his dancing lessons.

The other distraction he found appealed more to his temperament, and but for a severe accident Benes might have become a leader of the Czechs on other fields than those of Geneva. He became one of the best football players at the Gymnasium, and soon attracted the eyes of the Slavia selection committee. Slavia was already, at that time, the leading football club in Prague. For a period he played for them regularly, on the left wing. During a match against the 'Union' club of Zizkov, the East End of Prague, he broke his leg badly. He fainted, and had to be carried off the field. The first thing he said when he came to was, "Have we won?" The accident closed his football career. He had to spend six weeks in hospital as a result of it. On the other hand, it had the advantage of liberating him from his military service. This was of great importance in the history of his life. Had he been fit and liable for military service it would not have been easy for him to spend abroad those years which had such a decisive influence on his life. During his enforced stay in hospital, too, he read voraciously, and particularly worked at his French, in which he quickly achieved an astonishing proficiency. Zola attracted him most of all. Zola's style fascinated him. He

began a translation into Czech of Zola's *L'Assomoir*, which was finished and published during his first year at the University. In 1904 he passed out of the Gymnasium. The results of his final examination at school, the *Matura*, which corresponds roughly to our matriculation, were not brilliant. His 'conduct,' such an important item in the *Matura* certificate, was described as only 'satisfactory'! The full results were as follows :

" Benes, Eduard, born 28th May, 1884, at Kozlany (Bohemia), Catholic, attended the Imperial and Royal Czech College at Vinohrady, from 1896-7 to 1903-4. He completed his secondary studies at this school, and appears before the competent authorities for his matriculation examination for the first time.

" His examiners have granted him the following certificate :

" Conduct, satisfactory. Religion, fair. Latin, good. Greek, good. Czech, good. History and Geography, fair. Mathematics, good. Physics, fairly good. Natural Science, good. Elements of Philosophy, good. Gymnastics, fairly good. German, good. French, good (not compulsory). Shorthand, fairly good. (2nd section, not compulsory.)

" The candidate has fulfilled all the regulations and conditions ; he is therefore awarded

this present certificate of matriculation, which permits him to matriculate at the University.

" Vinohrady, 9th July, 1904. (Signed) Dr. Franz Krsek, Imperial and Royal Inspector of Schools, and President of the Board."

## THE WANDERING STUDENT

BENES matriculated at the ancient University of Prague, founded by Charles the Great, in the autumn term, 1904. Following his brothers' advice, he determined to become a secondary school teacher, and began to study the subjects most likely to get him a good post in such a school. He was inscribed in the philosophical faculty, and his main subjects outside the compulsory philosophy were French and German. His interest was not very keen, and his knowledge of German literature and language was at the time very fragmentary. He could not work up any enthusiasm about grammar and was anxious only to acquire just what was required for passing his 'State Examinations,' which alone qualify for teaching in secondary schools. The only lectures which attracted him were those of

Masaryk, although he was by no means yet converted to Masaryk's system of philosophy. Particularly did he reject Masaryk's views on Czech history. To Benes the key to Czech history was antagonism to the Germans; Masaryk, he thought, laid too much emphasis on the religious struggles. Benes was not alone in this attitude. Most of the young students of the day preferred this view. While they were attracted by Masaryk's personality, they would not accept his teachings. For Benes this view of Czech history had a further attraction, in that it accorded with his anti-clerical feelings. Religion was becoming for him more and more an enemy to be destroyed. He found in the French scholar, Ernest Denis, further confirmation of his views.

His greatest friend at this time was a certain Krystinch, an invalid who was a frequent visitor at the Benes's and an intimate friend of Masaryk's. Krystinch was one of the regular contributors to *Cas*. It was through him that Benes met Masaryk himself, and was advised by him to leave Prague and study in Paris at the Sorbonne. Benes' French was by now sufficiently good to enable him to attend courses at a French University with profit.

During the long vacation at the end of his first year he went to stay with his brother in a little village near Prague, and considered his

position. France had for a long time been the land of his dreams. Its language sounded more melodious in his ears than that of his own people, which struck him by comparison as very harsh, and its thinkers appealed to him more strongly than did the Czech philosophers and leaders. But one thing stood terribly in his way—he had no money. His own personal fortune amounted to the magnificent sum of 60 crowns! His father and his brothers told him they could not help him—they were not unwilling to do so, they simply had no money to give him. But Benes had made up his mind. His first step was to secure from the ‘Alliance Française de Prague’ free tuition at the Sorbonne. This done, he looked around for the means of earning enough to keep himself alive in Paris. Although he came from an obscure country village, and his only acquaintance with the outside world had been acquired in Prague, then no more than a provincial town, if a large one, he was not afraid of the great ‘Gay City.’ He knew he could keep himself away from its attractions and temptations. But he had, too, all the caution of a peasant, and knew that he could live on little, but that he had to have that bare minimum assured. Finally he persuaded two Prague papers, the *Pravo Lidu* and the *Volna Myslenka*, to appoint him as their Paris correspondent, to

write 'Paris Letters' for them. Armed with this and his 60 crowns he set off for Paris.

His first thought in Paris was to find cheap lodgings, and after a great deal of searching round, he took a furnished room in the rue Tournefort, not far from the Panthéon. It was indeed a miserable room, and Benes washed the floor of it himself. We find him writing home to his brother Vojtech complaining that it was a hard living he had in Paris, but that he had so arranged things that he could hold out for a year, anyhow. He begged him, too, to send him some cheap engravings from Prague; his upbringing made him reluctant to decorate his bare walls with cheap Paris nudes. Almost all his time was taken up by work. He attended lectures at the Sorbonne and at the 'Ecole libres des sciences politiques'; he took up Italian and Russian. The quarter of Paris in which he lived was full of Russians, particularly refugees from Russia, as it was the first year of the revolution. Among them Benes found a Russian Czech by the name of Svihovsky, an ardent revolutionary, who introduced him to a large number of Russian students, and converted him to the study of Russian literature. The friendship did not last long. Svihovsky was older than Benes, and, for a time, had a great influence upon him, but their temperaments were too

utterly different: the cold, austere realism of Benes could not for long endure the dazzling optimism of his new friend. But, as we shall presently see, the friendship opened his eyes to many things.

Of Benes in Paris we may say, as Browning said of his grammarian, "This man decided not to live, but know." He was actuated by two motives—personal ambition, and the necessity to earn his keep, and the increasing desire to do all he could to help his country. On the *Paris Miroir* and the *Volna Myslenka* depended his daily bread, and he fully realised the necessity for making himself indispensable to them in order to assure that daily bread. He therefore studied carefully what the readers of these two papers chiefly wanted, and discovered that what interested them most were 'advanced' and controversial political themes. He therefore set to work to master these themes, so as to be able to give them what they wanted. In so doing, he mastered the intricacies of French politics of that time. His other anxiety was to remove the abysmal ignorance he found everywhere on the subject of his own country, and his own people, and their problems and aspirations. His acquaintance with Svihovsky and, through him, with other Russians had been the most painfully awakening and chastening

experience. The shock of finding that the French knew nothing whatsoever about Bohemia or its Czechs had not prepared him for the contempt he found existing among his Russian friends for his countrymen. A letter to his brother Vojtech expresses his distress : " You would be astounded," he writes, " if you could see what they think of Czechs here—or rather what they don't think of us. Nobody, nobody at all knows anything about us—the Russians depise us—I've lost a lot of illusions." In another passage he writes : " At home we talk of ourselves as the most cultured of the Slav peoples. For two months I have been trying to discover what is known abroad of our culture and of our history. I have found nothing." This was a state of affairs to be remedied, and Benes, with his usual diligence, set to work to remedy it, by worming his way into French journalism and making his name known, and his articles acceptable.

His first efforts in this direction, made in conjunction with Svihovsky, were failures. Svihovsky persuaded him that they could exploit the feelings aroused in France by the riots in Prague in connection with the universal suffrage, and the brutal way in which they had been suppressed, but found to their disgust that the Paris papers required payment for the insertion of such articles. Benes



saw that his own prosaic method of approach was far more likely to lead to success than the enthusiastic amateurishness of Svihovsky. Svihovsky was full of plans for spreading the knowledge of the works of great Czech writers like Neruda and Machar among the French and the Russians, but plans they remained—beautiful castles in the air, with himself eventually Professor at the University of Prague, and Benes in some similar academic post of distinction. Benes returned to his plodding. He studied the French Press, watched for papers in which he might manage to get articles published, worked at his facts and his political science until his articles became valued for their intrinsic worth, and not for any sentimental reasons. During this period Benes published in the periodical *Nase Doba* his first important translation from English into Czech, Shaw's paper on the English Fabians and German Social democrats.

He won his way into newspapers, as we have said above, by the intrinsic merit of his articles—for their sound reasoning and logical presentation of ideas—they had little or no charm of style. The saying, 'Le style, c'est l'homme,' was never more aptly illustrated than by Benes. He had no feeling for art; he confesses the fact himself, with no attempt at amelioration. Art gave him no pleasure at all.

He is even capable of saying, in one of his contributions to *Pravo Lidu*, dealing with a Czech sculptor, Bohumil Kafka, "Art, too, should be an instrument in our hands to help us to cure social misery and the shameful injustices of society." He had the ideal 'Greats' mind—pure intellectualism, cold analysis; he never experienced things directly, personally. But his intellectual energy, his penetrating acumen, his complete freedom from the sway of emotion, appealed to the clear, logical French reader and to the arid intellectuals of Prague. But when he came to England, and met a coldness of manner that matched his own so well, he was repelled by it, and his peculiar lack of imagination prevented him from gaining any insight into the character of our insular people, which is so entirely different from that of our Continental neighbours.

He spent some four months in England in the summer of 1906. The visit came about in this way. His overwork in Paris, and the life of strain and lack of comfort he had led there, had upset his stomach, and he had been obliged to leave the capital to recuperate. Friends recommended Tréport on the English Channel as a modest and suitable resort. While staying there he took the idea into his head of going over to England, as it was now

so near. He had gone to Tréport for strictly medical reasons, not to enjoy a seaside holiday, and on his list for reading were several English books. He thought the opportunity a good one for improving his English, and for getting to know something of England's people and their social problems. His impressions were dismal, and make strange reading—and sometimes very unpalatable—for an Englishman. The climate first made a disagreeable impression upon him. He came at the end of August and found not only the people of London but also its climate cold. He shivered in London and longed for Paris, but he had come to see something, and something he would see. So he set about determinedly to investigate social conditions in London, and what he saw shocked and horrified him. Is it not amazing for us to hear of a man coming from Paris—the symbol of all that is naughty and 'Continental' in *that* sense, coming to London and finding it a foul sink of iniquity? A visit to a music-hall particularly outraged him and caused him to write that "Human flesh finds as ready a market in Puritan England as in Paris, the city of frivolity and pleasure. Nay, it seems that in London, where this trade is forbidden, people practise it more assiduously than in the 'City of Light,' with all its lax morals." He stayed

some weeks, studying the night-life of London, to make sure that he had missed none of the degradation it could provide. He went out of his room only after ten o'clock. His room was a miserable little affair in a tenement house. He frequently noticed the tenants from the floor above—husband, wife and boy—coming out at the same time for a breath of fresh air. One evening he chanced to follow them, and won a further glimpse into London's hells. At a corner of the street, the woman left her husband and child, and turned into a side street where she immediately began working as a common prostitute. Having had her fair share of customers, she rejoined her husband and son and all three went back to the house as though nothing had happened. "The husband who has been working all day," writes Benes, "at night sends his wife out to work. The wife goes and offers her body to the people who have been torturing her husband's body by day. What a tragedy!" He went, too, by night through the streets round Regent's Park and the Museum, and was horrified to see youths of from fifteen to eighteen promenading, waiting for the custom of perverted adults. He was convinced that London was ripe for the treatment meted out to the 'Cities of the Plains.' He saw all the misery of the down-and-outs in London, too.

He contrasts it with Paris : " Doubtless, these living corpses can be found in Paris, too, but how different is the atmosphere there : you will find there a materialistic people, granted, a people that knows how to enjoy itself, but which, at the same time, looks a little farther, and dreams of liberty, equality, happiness, life. In London only one feeling is possible, a feeling of disgust. One flees, disillusioned and shocked." The English were a people who never said thank you, who never spoke to you or passed the time of day with you. They never extended a hand, except to take money. " Money, money, money ! " was the only thought night and day of these Londoners, Benes considered, these degenerates, " sunk to the neck in licentiousness, drunkenness and prostitution."

Our politics and our politicians pleased him little better. He saw England in the grip of an unholy trinity—Capitalism, Clericalism, Alcoholism. He put it all down to the Boer War, the moral effects of which were sapping the nation's health. He considered England a sick, if not a dying, country. Our politicians made him feel sick, especially Asquith, against whom he bore two violent grudges : firstly for his opposition to Home Rule for Ireland, and secondly for his attitude towards the suffragettes. He found particularly ungentlemanly





Asquith's orders to turn the hosepipes on them ! He left England in a fog, with a sense of relief, and a feeling of homesickness for the land of his heart. He sat in the bows of the boat straining for the first glimpse of France. He returned to France with renewed energy, for he published at least six articles a month in Czech papers ; in all he wrote about eighty articles for social-democratic papers on a variety of subjects ; most dealt with French or English politics, problems of the Church, social organisation and education, many with questions concerning Socialism and Trades Unionism, and a few with topical international issues. He continued his studies in Paris at the same time and began to think about taking his doctorate. He wished to become Doctor of Law at the University of Dijon, where he had been duly enrolled, and after hesitating for some time, chose as his thesis, ' Le Problème autrichien et la question tchèque '—a typical thesis. But in the autumn of 1907 he went to Germany, to Berlin, where he was anxious to see the Hohenzollern system in action. His visit only served to confirm and heighten his feelings of distrust and hatred towards the Germans. He wrote several articles there, and translated F. K. Volneys' *Ruins*. He left Berlin for Paris in the summer to get his thesis published, and take his doctorate. Having



done so, he returned to Berlin and stayed there until September. The whole time he was busy writing for Czech and French papers. Several of his articles at this period are concerned with a new problem that was beginning to interest him—the problem of the different nationalities in Europe, and their groupings according to States; two typical articles on this subject are, 'National Struggles in Belgium,' 'Pan-German Plans and Ideas.' A very interesting title is the one given to an article he wrote for the Czech paper *Novina*, 'From the Land of Might and Strength.'

In September, 1908, Benes went back to Prague, after an absence of three years.

## PRAGUE PROFESSOR AND FAMILY MAN

BENES was now a fully-fledged Doctor of Law of the University of Dijon, and was anxious to find a profitable use for the knowledge and academic qualifications he had acquired. He was at first undecided. He could no longer go on working for the Socialist Press, although he contributed articles from time to time, because

he could no longer accept Marxist doctrine. He joined Masaryk's party, the Strana pokroková, with which he had already begun to work while he was in Berlin. This party had been founded by Masaryk in 1900, as a kind of bridge between Liberalism and Socialism. It was a realistic, progressive, left-wing party. Its organ was *Cas*, to which he had already been introduced by his student friend, Krystinck. He took no very active part in the activities of the party at first. He found himself in opposition to the tactics of the leaders of the movement, but confined himself to occasional tactful criticism and took no prominent part in debates. Even for *Cas* he did no more than write a few articles of literary criticism. He took a room in Vinohrady, and continued his studies, concentrating this time on philosophy; Descartes, Kant, Locke and Hume were his chosen guides, and on their foundations he built up his realistic and critical philosophical outlook.

During the first year after his return to Prague his mother died suddenly at Kozlany, and Benes went to the funeral. At the family reunion he felt completely out of place. He had forgotten Kozlany, and his brothers and sisters had become strangers to him. He felt no ties with his birthplace, and returned to Prague as soon as possible. His wish to return

was made stronger by the fact that he had now in Prague a very strong interest—our austere Benes had fallen in love! While in Paris, among the Czech student colony there, he had become acquainted with five Czech girls. At the time it had seemed to be Miss Olic, daughter of the Chief of Police of Prague, who might succeed in thawing the icicle that served as heart for Benes. He had even mentioned her in letters to his brother, talked of buying a present for her and had said she would be useful to get him out of trouble, should he ever fall into the hands of the police. But his most intimate friend among these girls had been Hanna Vlcek, a typical Slav—her hair fair as only a Slav girl's can be, her complexion almost dark, and deep grey eyes. He had met her again in Prague. When he was not studying or writing, he was walking with her in the lovely parks of Prague. They became engaged, but he could not marry her until he found a job to give him the means to support her, or even to begin to set up house in the most modest way.

He considered applying for a post in Vienna; he remembered that Masaryk had begun there, and went to ask Masaryk's advice and aid. Masaryk was all in favour of his going there. He was sure that Benes could get work in the Library of Parliament and once established

there, it was but a step to the University and a lectureship or tutorship. Masaryk not only encouraged him to go, but himself accompanied him to Vienna. As M.P. he introduced Benes to the Czech minister, Pacak, who was in with the Government party. Benes went to Vienna for the first time in his life. He entered the city without enthusiasm. Vienna, the capital of the great Austro-Hungarian empire of which his own country was a part, Vienna whose glories are the theme of so many songs, to visit which was the dream of every girl in the empire and the Balkans, left Benes completely cold. Paris was the only city for him. He arrived in Vienna in the morning, went with Masaryk to the Houses of Parliament, and went under his guidance to Pacak. Pacak took them to see Pattai, the Chairman of Parliament, and he again introduced them to Lipinsky, the Head Librarian. By lunch-time all was over, and Masaryk showed Benes to where the great Czech poet Machar was living, and left him there. It was already obvious to Benes that dreams of a University post at Vienna were idle. Everybody had been very kind to him, but everybody had equally avoided giving him any definite answer. He spent the afternoon with Machar, for whom he had a great admiration, and was accompanied by Machar

and his daughter to the station in the evening, and left Vienna on the same day that he had arrived. He left it with very few regrets.

The question of finding a post was now, however, becoming urgent. He was anxious to marry his Hanna and settle down. Happening to meet an old friend of his, Professor Drtina, who took a fatherly interest in him, he poured out all his troubles into his sympathetic ear. Drtina promised him that as soon as he had taken his doctorate at the University of Prague he would secure him a secondary teaching post. He passed his finals in June, 1909, and Drtina kept his word and got him a post at the Prague Commercial Academy. When he drew his first salary, Benes, now 25, married his Hanna, and settled down to a quiet family life. He now had plenty of leisure, but gave up neither of his former loves—political writings and Paris. During his holidays he went back to Paris with his wife, and revisited his old haunts. He began a long and detailed account of the history of socialism. The first part of this he published in 1910 under the title, *Short Survey of the Development of Modern Socialism*. He wrote for *Nase Doba* a study of socialism in England. He published a translation of Edward Carpenter's *Civilisation, its Consequences and Cure*. He wrote a pamphlet with the title *Our Political*

*Education and the Necessity for a Social-Political University.* On the occasion of Masaryk's sixtieth birthday a volume of essays was published to celebrate the event, and Benes' contribution was called 'Masaryk's Influence on Our Younger Generation.' His salary was adequate for his needs and he bought some land near Prague, partly not to lose touch with the soil, and partly as investment. He had a house built on this patch of ground.

In 1911 he began another thesis for the University on the nature of political parties. In 1912 it was published and in the following year, on the strength of it, he was appointed to a chair of sociology at Prague University. This appointment caused him to pay more and more attention to sociological and scientific study. He had to prepare his lectures and work at scientific themes. But he did not give up his political activities altogether. His realistic mind never allowed him to become a pure academician. This trend is clearly shown in an article he wrote addressed to his students 'On the Necessity of a Philosophic Education for Daily Life.' The Benes of the Paris days seemed dead. His acute socialism had been abandoned for a gentler creed of gradual improvement within existing organisations. His plans for the revival of Czech nationalism

had formed into the dream of an Austrian Empire in which the dominant rôle should belong to the Slav elements. Even his fierce anti-religious sentiments had become less violent ; he was still bitterly anti-clerical, but he had arrived at the view that religion had a place in the order of the world and even that there must be some "finalism immanent in things, and a destiny governed by providence"—which is going as near to saying "There is a God" as one possibly can without using the actual words. Benes' life seemed now to be set in its appointed path, from which there was no apparent reason why it should ever deviate. He had reached all the goals he had placed before himself when he set out on his 'Sehr-und-Wanderjahre,' and had even gone beyond them. A school teacher had been the highest point of his boyhood dreams. And now the whole scale of academic honours stood waiting his easy ascension. Events, however, were moving that were beyond his control, and even outside his immediate ken, which were rudely to disturb his peaceful professional life and home.

Before we begin this stirring chapter, it will be as well to consider where Benes stood intellectually, and what special knowledges and abilities he had developed in this period, which later carried him inevitably to the position of first man of his people. It is, per-

haps, not of very general interest, but it explains the rapid and unquestioned rise to power of Dr. Eduard Benes.

## INTELLECTUAL TRAINING

BENES' interest in politics really began, as we have already noted, in Paris when he had to earn his living by writing articles on political subjects. He developed a knowledge of, and instinct for, international affairs such as few people in Europe possess—certainly almost no one besides himself outside professional 'Foreign Office' circles. But the whole time he was engaged in surveying the international horizon, he never forgot the interests and aspirations of his own people. He never forgot the necessity borne in on him so insistently in Paris, of informing the world of the very existence of his nation. Gradually everything he studied, everything he wrote about, and his whole philosophic and political outlook began to be considered chiefly from the Czech angle. In his search for information and enlightenment he stayed in and examined foreign countries. This is of the utmost importance just for a member of a small and uninfluential



people—it is so easy otherwise for him to lose all sense of proportion and fall into the worst kind of parochialism.

He was fortunate, too, in coming under, and surrendering to, the influence of Masaryk. His schoolboy studies in philosophy and sociology had given him a crude outlook on the world and life. His first political creed was a strongly Marxist view of democracy. He might have been described as a materialist-positivist. His own critical examination of phenomena, but particularly Masaryk's influence, led him to the ultimate rejection of both views. The philosophical position to which he later attained cannot better be described than in his own words, as "Critical Realism." It was the best possible philosophical jumping-off-ground for the tasks with which he was to be confronted. It led him to be open-minded, undogmatic, ready to see the other person's point of view, tolerant—in short, democratic in the fullest and truest sense of the word. What better qualities could be sought for in one of the creators and leaders of a new State?

On the practical side, too, his training had been just what was required. The method he had always followed, in practical, as well as in philosophical matters, was the scientific method—the method first promulgated by one of the nation he so loathed and despised the

first time he made their acquaintance—Francis Bacon. First observation, and then theory was his principle, and it was just this method of analysis and observation that made his faith in pure democracy so strong, and his fight to put it into practice so unrelenting and effective.

Further, he had studied the countries and problems with which the as yet undreamt-of new State would first come into conflict. France, we know, even before, and much more strongly after his visit to Paris, was his chosen mistress. There was, for him, the home of the Great Revolution that had first given to Europe the ideas of liberty, equality, and brotherhood, which still flourished there as nowhere else in the world. He was not blind, however, to France's faults, and his pen was often severely critical. He realised what France might, could, and what in fact she eventually did, become for his own people. He recognised that France was the spiritual home of his countrymen, and that France could be of inestimable service to their cause.

We have seen what feelings of revulsion England awoke in Benes on his first visit, but these did not prevent him from making a close investigation into her political structure, her social organisation and her position in the world. He came to revise his estimate of us,

and while we never won his love or admiration as a people, he quickly recognised our dominating position in world politics, and was firmly convinced that without the mighty support of England no cause in Europe would be won.

To Germany he devoted very special attention. He studied the works of the great German philosophers thoroughly, and made himself familiar with the mental and philosophical structure of her life. What he found only served to widen and deepen the hatred of them he had sucked in with his mother's milk. He was one of the first thinkers in Europe—I say 'Thinkers' deliberately, not to confuse him with the sensational 'peril,' yellow, red or black, mongers of the cheap Press—to grasp the deep-rootedness and sincerity of the Pan German and racial-superiority ideas which were not taken seriously by most people until the war showed them how real they were and which to-day are keeping not only Europe, but the whole world breathless. Naturally, he was most struck by the way in which these ideas were directed against the Slavs. "Don't forget," he tells his fellow-Czechs, "that even the meanest German, mean to the depths of his being, looks upon each one of us as an inferior." He points out that the theories of Pan Germanism and of the absolute superiority of the German 'race' over every other form of

humanity were not the property of certain classes, but spread far and wide through every section of the people. He saw in this an eminent threat to the whole of the Slav race, and a war to the death that was inevitable.

Russia, naturally, he did not neglect, if only as a kind of antidote to Germany. We have seen how, in Paris, he came into contact with Russians, and developed a keen interest in Russian literature. He even at one time toyed with the idea of going to Russia to finish off his studies.

The possibility, nay, probability, of a world-war had early occurred to Benes, and he had written many articles discussing how the Franco-German quarrels, and growing British-German rivalry on the high seas were leading towards Armageddon. His studies of this problem led him to see the vital importance for Europe of Franco-British understanding, which he sought to promote by all the means at his disposal, particularly after the war when he was a statesman whose word had some weight. As early as 1907 we find him writing, "The French Public Opinion received news of the Entente Cordiale with great satisfaction. These two peoples have been objects of jealousy to one another throughout a long period of history, only now have they come to see what tremendous harm this mutual

jealousy was doing them both." The danger of war naturally led him to the problem of its avoidance, and led him to the idea of international co-operation and international courts, the germs of the idea of the League of Nations. An extract from an article he wrote for *Volna Myslenka* as early as 1907, will show best how well he had grasped and worked out the principles on which the League of Nations was to be constructed.

"International law has its chief sources in pacts and conferences, moreover the arbitration courts have on several occasions functioned successfully. And the so-called authoritative governments will, sooner or later, go bankrupt under the influence of democracy, whether they submit to arbitration or not. These governments, which cling so hard to their authority and to their international sovereignty developed from the feudal system of the Middle Ages, are steeped in absolutism, and refuse to listen to any talk about the rule of the people. So far only the governments have given their views on the subject of the possibilities of the arbitration courts, not the people. In the democratic French Republic it is not only the government that has expressed its views, but also the people, and the people have made it clear that they very much desire an arbitration court. England, who has

evolved into a certain degree of democracy, makes a proposal which involves an international arbitration court. Only Germany with her absolutist Wilhelms and Bulows refuses to have anything to do with arbitration courts and limitations of armaments, simply for the reason that those who are in favour of them—and these are a tremendous number—may not be heard and are bludgeoned into silence.”

His conviction that democracy was the only political ideal worthy of realisation had not blinded him to its difficulties and dangers : on the contrary, he had only too clear a grasp of the danger spots and weaknesses of democratic government. But he saw not only the dangers, but also the safeguards, and had given careful consideration to the way in which the defects might be overcome. He saw clearly, and that from personal experience, that one great danger was the party system. Parties get so absorbed in their own point of view, and their own struggle for power that they become utterly selfish, and ready to sacrifice anything and everything for the sake of political power. Again and again he attacked this weakness which threatens now to prove fatal to the democratic system. The fundamental causes of this petty party bickering he also divined and analysed—they lie in the lack of education

of the masses on whom democracy must finally rest, on the insufficient training and intellectual qualification of democratic leaders, on the imperfections of political culture, and in a lack of political tradition.

As a democrat he was of course deeply interested in social questions, and devoted a great deal of his time to their study. He wrote papers on unemployment, population, the position of women, hours of work, alcohol, etc. He studied conditions in various countries in Europe. And he went deeper into the problem than the surface-questions such as these. He went into the theoretical basis and studied every theory of note connected with the problem, in an effort to familiarise himself with all these theories so that he could compare and weigh them one against the other, so that finally he could work out his own logical conclusions on a sufficient ground.

We have already described the interest he took in the problem of the different nationalities in Europe; how he recognised the urgent need for making his nation known; how he realised the political immaturity of his people and called for schools and institutes to educate the Czechs into political manhood.

From all this, it is, we hope, clear, that when the Great War broke out it would have been difficult to find any man in Europe who was so

well equipped to form a true picture of the nature and essence of the catastrophe, and to adopt the right attitude towards it. No one else could have been better fitted for the great tasks awaiting him.

## CONSPIRATOR AND SPY

AN amazing new chapter now opens in the life of Benes. The studious and retiring professor, the peaceful husband happy in his little country villa with his wife, is suddenly hurled into a life of conspiracy with forged passports, bribed servants, underground communications, secret codes, and all the paraphernalia of a novel by William le Quex. When war broke out in 1914, all those Czechs—and they included almost the whole of the educated classes—who resented the treatment meted out to them by the Austrian Government, saw and were determined to make use of an opportunity for regaining their national independence. But they were very divided as to how this was to be achieved. The greatest part looked for salvation to Russia. Others wished to press their advantage within the Empire, and make Vienna pay for their



loyalty by forcing good terms out of her. The most radical wished to break up the Austro-Hungarian Empire entirely, and join with the Slovaks to form an independent republic of their own. To this last section belonged Masaryk and Benes, but they could not at first openly state their views, nor were they at first sure that the time was ripe for doing so. In the case of Benes it was first the entry of Britain into the war, and secondly the failure in September of the great German drive on Paris that convinced him that the Allies were bound to win, that Austria-Hungary would therefore, anyhow, break up, and that the quicker the Czechs got to work to convince the Allies that their aid, in return for their national independence, would help them to defeat the Central Powers, the better it would be for them. So he began to work actively, though secretly for these results. His first step was to join the staff of *Cas*, and thus completely identify himself with the strana pokroková, Masaryk's Progressive party. To begin, he did nothing more than offer occasional mild criticisms of plans put forward when members of the party came together, and contribute a few articles of literary criticism to *Cas*.

Benes' deep-rooted peasant canniess was never better demonstrated than when, in

August, 1914, in the first fortnight of the month even, he went to the police headquarters, and secured for himself a passport for foreign travel. We must remember that in those happy pre-war days a passport was an extremely rare document, which ordinary mortals never possessed or even saw. It was possible to move freely all over Europe without one. Russia was the only country where such a thing was ordinarily necessary. Benes had made all his previous journeys to France, Britain and Russia without a passport. Now he was prepared for any eventuality, and began to throw himself more openly and wholeheartedly into the cause of revolution. As a preparatory exercise he began to study the war-mentality of Germany, and to work out Germany's plans and aims. The results of his studies he set down in the form of short papers on various aspects of the question, which were published one after another in *Cas*. At the same time he began openly to associate with the leaders of the progressive movement. Gradually these people came to form a kind of revolutionary committee, including such men as Dr. Jan Herben, who was Editor-in-Chief of *Cas*, Cyril Dusek, a journalist, Dr. Samal, a barrister, Dubsky, a publisher, Pfeffermann, an engineer, as well as Masaryk and Benes themselves. They met at the house of another

barrister of Prague, Dr. Boucek. Later the place of rendezvous was moved to the house of Dr. Samal, and the group was joined by Dr. Kramar, who afterwards became the first Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Dr. Rasin, subsequently first Czechoslovak Minister for Finance, and Dr. Scheiner, organising chairman of the Sokol movement. Of these three men both Dr. Kramar and Dr. Rasin were condemned to death for treasonable activities, but were pardoned after the death of Kaiser Franz Joseph by his successor, the Emperor Karl, who tried to conciliate the Slavs in his Empire. This organisation was later given the rather sensational name, 'Maňa.'

The running of the organisation was at first made exceedingly difficult by the fact that the conspirators were sure neither of themselves nor of each other. Although all of them university men, they were also all of peasant origin, and distrusted one another as peasants are apt to do. They exchanged ideas, and information they had gleaned and Benes was able to tell them a great deal about German war-mentality, and about German plans for expansion. In the beginning they were chiefly anxious to find out what was going on in Germany and abroad, and to watch which way the cat was likely to jump. But it was Masaryk who supplied them with the most

startling and detailed information. From a source which he never betrayed to any of them, except Benes, he was able to tell them the exact contents of all the secret dispatches of Bethmann-Hollweg, the German Chancellor, to Sturgkh, the Prime Minister of Austria ; he was able to inform them of all that was going on at the general headquarters of the Archduke Frederick ; he knew what Prince Thun, Imperial Governor of Prague, had communicated to Baron Heinold, the Home Secretary of Austria, about the attitude of the Czechs, even so accurately as to be able to report the words of a seditious little song which, the Prince complained, Czech soldiers were singing on the Eastern Front—‘ Scarlet pennon, flying colours, I must march against the Russians—don’t know why.’ This information was all obtained through Baron Heinold’s valet, a man called Kovanda. Kovanda used to extract the State documents from his master’s *escritoire* each evening, copy them, and then replace them carefully. The copies he had made he handed on to the Czech poet Machar, who was employed in a bank in Vienna, and he, in his turn, passed them on to Masaryk. This connection with Kovanda, which let them into the privy counsels of the Austrian Government, was of the utmost importance to the conspirators. They were

playing a dangerous game under the famous articles 58 and 59 of the Austrian Penal Code, they had all a hundred times, if only by their conversations, made themselves guilty of high treason, the penalty for which was unequivocally death. Their knowledge of what was happening in the Austrian equivalent of Home Office and Scotland Yard combined, enabled them to escape or outwit the police on numberless occasions.

But they were still hesitant and doubtful—hesitant to risk their positions, fortunes and lives, doubtful of the support of their own people and the outcome of the war. Should they turn to Russia? Russia was great, but so was Germany still. And Russia was so far! So far! And would the Allies win? And were their own people worthy of openly risking their necks for? Some argued that the Czech people, as a people, had become too slavish and cowardly, and would repudiate any revolutionary step taken on their behalf, to save their own skins. And so the debates went on endlessly, round and round the same points. These cautious and realistic peasants' sons were all for ca'canny. On one of the last evenings that Masaryk spent in their midst when he and Benes had long decided on action, the same academic arguments were being gone through. Masaryk himself took part in the discussion,

and led them through the possibilities he had himself considered—The Russians had almost taken Cracow, and many a heart in Bohemia beat quicker. They expected the Russians to come to Prague, perhaps by Christmas. Some in Masaryk's group inclined to this view, too. Masaryk expounded: a Romanov on the throne of Wenceslas they had suggested to him; he rejected the idea: one could not expect a good King from the House of the Romanovs; the West might offer better kings: he had himself thought of the Duke of Connaught, or possibly a son of the Danish Royal Family; but no, the best form of government was the republican.

There was one of the conspirators who was heartily sick of all this talk, and refusal to come out into the open. It was Benes. He had already, as we have seen, decided that the Allies must win the war, and was determined to do all he could to aid their victory—but always, of course, in the interests of his own country. He decided he must talk to Masaryk, and he plucked up his courage to go and call on him. He met Masaryk coming out of his house, and begged to be allowed to walk along with him. Masaryk made no objections, and he and his one-time pupil walked through the quiet and lovely streets of the castle-quarter, with the panorama of Prague spread out at their

feet. They talked of the war, of its possible outcome, of its probable effects, until Benes could stand it no longer, but burst out impetuously, "And we, we Czechs, are we to sit at home talking, watching, and doing nothing?" Masaryk stopped, looked him carefully up and down, and said quietly, "something has been done." He then went on to explain how he had made an excuse of the departure of a sister-in-law of his to America to get permission to go to Rotterdam to see her off. He had asked meanwhile, secretly, to be allowed by the British Government to see there, also, of course, in the greatest secrecy, someone of standing, before whom he could put the Czech case. He had met there Wickham Steed, formerly *Times* correspondent at Vienna, then foreign Editor of that great and influential newspaper. Wickham Steed again had introduced him to a young Scots historian, Seton-Watson, from King's College, London. Further he had met Steed's friend, Miss Rose, and an old friend of Benes' himself, Professor Denis of Paris. It was not much, he confessed modestly, but it was a beginning, and he had interested them all in the Czech cause, and they had all promised to do their utmost to support that cause.

Benes could hardly wait for Masaryk to finish speaking. He was impatient to offer his

services wholeheartedly and utterly to his leader. Masaryk was impressed by the obviously sincere enthusiasm and burning desire for action of his former pupil. He was looking desperately for someone he could trust, upon whom he could rely to maintain his delicate connections with Prague from the inevitable day when he would have to leave. He had to find someone to keep up the vital connection with Kovanda; and that person had to be fearless, and yet possessed of fine tact; to offend Kovanda in any way would have been fatal. He himself had to leave Prague to establish relationships abroad and it was very unlikely that he would ever be able to return. The police were already hot on his trail. At this chance meeting he had found his man. He never doubted it for one moment after this conversation, and, of course, never had the slightest reason to regret it. In another vital question, too, Benes proved of the utmost value. In discussing the problems and difficulties facing them, Masaryk mentioned one of the most acute—lack of funds. Benes remembered that his wife had an aunt who was blessed with a large fortune, and promised to provide funds.

This conversation was the first of many. Each night after the meetings of the conspirators, Benes and Masaryk walked away



together, and Masaryk entrusted Benes with all his plans, and all his hopes for the future. Benes proved worthy of the trust. He made no attempt to use Masaryk's favour and confidence to win power for himself, he was content to be an instrument in the hands of his master. One of the first tasks laid upon him was that of procuring newspapers from abroad, so that they might be informed of what was happening outside. For this purpose Benes undertook many journeys to Vienna, and travelled under a variety of names, to avoid arousing the suspicions of the police. Later he got in with some waiters at Dresden, and succeeded in obtaining papers from them, too. On an occasion, when Masaryk himself could not go to Vienna, he showed Benes the highest possible mark of confidence, in sending him to Kovanda for certain State papers vital to the Czech cause. But finally things became too hot for Masaryk, and he had to prepare to leave. Before doing so, he made Benes completely up to date with all his thoughts and actions. He appointed Benes his spiritual heir, should anything happen to him he explained to him what he desired the future relationship with Hungary, Russia, Germany, Poland and the Slavs of the south of the empire to be. He examined and attempted to resolve the problems and difficulties he saw

would arise in any attempt to unite these same Slavs of the south, and laid great emphasis on the delicacy but extreme importance of bringing about some reconciliation between the southern Slavs and the Italians, without which Austria-Hungary would be considerably strengthened in her dealings with them.

His political foresight was almost uncanny ; in Benes' own words : " Even then he spoke of the possibility of the Polish corridor, and discussed the economic and financial problems with which we should be faced at the beginning of our independent existence. He outlined the functions that the national council were to exercise, and said he wished to see Sokol legions formed at home." Benes in a further passage reveals how deeply he realised the importance of what was being confided to him, and tells us of the steps he took to ensure that none of it should get lost. " I took all these details down in shorthand," he tells us, " as I was ready to risk anything rather than lose the record of them. And so, when I feared I should be searched, and destroyed many papers, these notes I saved. When I had to leave Prague, finally, in September, 1915, I put them into a bottle, together with notes I had made on talks with Masaryk in Switzerland, on ' Mafia ' meetings, and several messages from Masaryk to people in Prague, and

buried them in the garden of the house where I was staying in the country." Masaryk also put Benes in touch with a large number of important people, particularly in the Socialist camp, who were to be won over to the idea of the Czech revolution.

At last the warnings through Kovanda became urgent. Masaryk must not delay his departure any longer. On the 17th December, 1914, Masaryk left Prague for Zürich. His last actions before doing so had been to secure communications with Prague through Benes. He gave him the addresses of all the people abroad with whom he was in contact; he particularly charged him to work closely with Scheiner, President of the Sokol Association; he arranged with him an elaborate telegraphic code: special key expressions were arranged to mean that so-and-so was in prison, that *Cas* had been suspended, that danger of betrayal or imprisonment threatened Masaryk, that arrests were likely to take place of other people; finally he handed over to him the office of Editor-in-Chief of the paper *Nase Doba* (our *Times*). Benes was left to carry on the task of organising the revolution.

Masaryk had not long left Prague when Benes had his first opportunity of showing his personal courage, his energy and his devotion to the cause. Masaryk thought it desirable to

return to Prague, but Benes was aware, through the usual channels, that should he do so, he ran a great danger of being arrested. Benes considered Masaryk to be the personification of the future Czechoslovakia, and was unwilling to run any kind of risk. Despite the very grave danger of arrest and exposure, Benes decided he must go personally to Switzerland to dissuade Masaryk. He got through safely, the first week in February, and succeeded in making Masaryk see that his wish to return would have fatal results if fulfilled. He was able to convince him all the more easily, because Masaryk was now more than ever confident that Benes could do everything he wished done as well as he could himself. The journey was in other respects also not wasted. They went over their telegraphic code again, to make sure that, in the haste in which it had been arranged, no possibilities of disastrous misunderstanding could arise, and checked once more the details of the political action they had planned, and compared the lists of addresses of foreign correspondents. But more important still, Benes made the acquaintance of a Russian journalist, Swatkowsky, who was subsequently of great service to the Czech movement, both in Tsarist Russia and in the West. He also smuggled back with him a considerable quantity of

political literature designed to open the eyes of the people he wished to convert. On his return he immediately informed Kramar, Scheiner, Samal, and Rasin of his conversations with Masaryk and Swatkowsky, and a definitely revolutionary committee was formed to organise the revolution, with enormous ramifications among the Czech political leaders and intelligentsia. The agrarian Svekla, the Socialist Soukup, the National Socialist Klopac, all came into the conspiracy by degrees. Only the Czech clergy refused to have anything to do with the movement. For them the Hapsburgs represented the strongest force for Roman Catholicism in Central Europe, and they were not going to abandon it. But the very divergence of the elements brought together made the organisation of conspirators hard to manage. They had such different aims and ideals. Many of them, too, were still only half-heartedly supporters of the idea of a complete revolution. Many of them dreamed of Slav domination in an Austro-Hungarian Empire. And Benes found this difficulty most when it came to the important question of providing funds for the revolution.

The revolutionary group had started with almost no funds, and the bulk of what he had had, Benes had given to Masaryk when he left for Switzerland. Already, on his first visit,

Masaryk was complaining that his efforts were being held up for lack of money. And Benes and his associates had to eat, find money for railway tickets, for bribes, and a hundred and one other little things. Benes had a wife, and he had perforce given up his job. Even revolutionaries cannot live on enthusiasm and air alone. Benes' efforts to raise money in Prague led to bitter disillusionments. Let him speak for himself. "I wanted to raise funds from among well-known people, and particularly from among the friends of Masaryk, members of the progressive party. I stopped my efforts very quickly, because the first attempts made me see the uselessness of such efforts. I did, indeed, approach two members of the party whose wealth and position were well known to everybody. The first, after I had had a long conversation with him one evening, handed me, with a conspiratorial air—one hundred crowns! The other, shortly afterwards, took me to a café, and gave me a long disquisition on his legal views and opinions—but not a penny besides!" A few individuals were more generous. Scheiner had given 10,000 crowns to the original funds, which had been used for Masaryk, and an American, Charles R. Crane, a personal friend of Masaryk's was very generous. But, obviously such isolated individual help was of very

little use indeed. As the movement grew, expenses grew. Police spies were becoming more and more inquisitive and cost more and more to buy off. The constant telegrams abroad swallowed up a great deal of money. Finally Benes decided that the only practical way of obtaining funds was to appeal to those Czechs who had emigrated to America, and amassed fortunes there. But someone had to go out as spokesman, and Benes decided on his brother Vojtech. It was not easy, of course, in those days of war for anyone, and particularly for a member of a people strongly suspected of disaffection, to obtain a passport. It was managed for Vojtech by pretending that he was going to America "to enquire into new methods of the manufacture of artificial limbs for disabled soldiers." A passport was granted, and Vojtech was immediately successful. Funds began to arrive at Zürich a few months after Vojtech left Prague.

But these were not the only difficulties. Communications had to be kept up with Switzerland, and a regular supply of foreign political literature had to be ensured. Letters and telegrams were sent in code, and to fictitious addresses; Swatkovsky was used as an accommodation address; newspaper advertisements were resorted to, in fact all the devices to be met with in Edgar Wallace. The means







used for smuggling literature over the frontier were extremely ingenious and varied. Papers were inserted into book-bindings, into handbags, pencils, fountain-pens, keys, coat-buttons, suit-case handles, and walking-sticks. Through these devious channels, shortly after getting his brother out to America, Benes was informed that Masaryk urgently wanted to see him in Zürich. Benes deliberated as to the best way of getting there, and decided that this time, at least, 'honesty' was 'the best policy.' That Masaryk had been under surveillance by the Austrian secret police could not be doubted. But Masaryk had as yet been very circumspect and had not openly declared revolutionary war on the Empire. He was, after all, in his way, something of a world figure, as the foremost and finest representative of Czech scholarship and culture. Very probably the Austrians did not wish to drive him into irretrievable opposition, but hoped still to regain him, although they must have known that his attitude was, to say the least, not enthusiastically friendly.

Luckily, too, despite all the claims on his time, Benes had not given up entirely his intellectual work; he was still Editor of *Nase Doba*, and for it he had written articles which were the result of his still continued studies of German war-literature. He therefore applied

for permission to visit Switzerland in order to continue his studies: "For reasons of a scholastic nature" he worded it. This was a clever move. He had to see Masaryk, and it was very improbable that their meeting could be kept a secret from the Austrian secret police. He might have got out, but he had to get in again. The best thing was therefore to meet Masaryk openly, as one professor meeting another. Visas were granted him, and he reached Switzerland safely.

Masaryk soon explained to Benes the urgency of the conference. Masaryk had got things moving, but he had to be able to show people that he was not merely a man talking in the air, but someone really speaking on behalf of the whole Czech nation. As he put it, "Nobody will give us something for nothing." He also urged Benes to convince the people in Prague that it was absolutely no use relying on Russia, nor even on the Allies, unless they could somehow convince the Allies that they would gain by supporting the Czech cause. He also pointed out to Benes the urgent need for helpers. He needed journalists and speakers with a knowledge at least of French, and preferably of English as well. He mentioned two helpers whom he urged Benes to persuade to come out immediately and help him—Kramar and Scheiner. The latter was needed

to form the Czech legions in Russia, and Kramar he wanted to help him in his own work. He also again affirmed his need for money—"Propaganda is expensive," was his bitter cry.

Well may Masaryk have said, "Without this man we should not have had our revolution." Masaryk gave the orders, laid down the lines of policy, Benes had to follow them. And his tasks became harder and harder. The task of finding people suitable, and at the same time trustworthy enough, was almost incredibly difficult, and Benes met with even more disillusionments here than when trying to raise funds. His first blow was his interview with Kramar. Kramar and Masaryk were old political enemies. Kramar assured Benes that he was only too ready to bury the hatchet and forget all old differences in the face of the national emergency—in fact had already done so. But when Benes explained to him Masaryk's desire that he should go out to Switzerland and join him, he refused point-blank. He was deaf to all arguments. Yes, he agreed, Masaryk's idea in creating a Czech revolutionary society in Prague, ready to do all possible for the Czech people accordingly as events fell out was excellent, but he, personally, was convinced that Russia alone was sufficient to liberate Czechoslovakia. He had nothing

whatever to say against Masaryk's having found an asylum abroad, but his place was not over the frontier, but on his own native soil : there he would meet all eventualities. Kramar was a conceited romantic, personally jealous of Masaryk, dreaming great dreams of perhaps himself being King of Bohemia, or at least the proud and acclaimed head of the Czech nation, with Masaryk playing a very secondary part as foreign ambassador, a witness to Kramar's glory. Benes left him, bitterly disappointed, because he realised how far this man was from their hopes and ideals, realised, too, that, unless his beloved Russia came, he did not desire the destruction of the Hapsburg Empire. Having, at last, succeeded in finding suitable men for sending out, he was faced with the problem of *getting* them out. This time he had recourse to the forging of passports. He somehow managed to get hold of some blank passports from the Prague Government offices, and also to buy several old Austrian and foreign ones. Out of these he manufactured new passports, and provided them with visas. One of the persons who managed to get out on one of these forged passports was Plesinger, who later became Czechoslovak Minister at Copenhagen. He travelled under the name of Bozinow.

But all this activity could not long be kept

from the attention of the police, and the first blow fell shortly after a very important meeting of the Mafia, held on the 20th of May, 1915. The meeting, consisting of six of the most important members, assembled in the house of Dr. Samal, to hear Benes' report on his visit to Zürich. Benes had brought some tangible proof of the progress that was being made abroad in the cause of Bohemia. He told them that an army was being constructed in Russia out of Czech prisoners-of-war, and Czech deserters from the Austrian Army. He showed them the first number of a propaganda paper in French, for circulation in France, called, *La Nation Tchèque*, and of another one in Czech, for circulation chiefly among Czechs resident abroad, particularly in America, called *Ceskoslovenská Samostatnost* (Czechoslovak Independence). He produced for them to see a copy of Masaryk's first pamphlet in English, *Independent Bohemia*, and a work of the French historian, Denis, called, *La Guerre*, in which the historian appeals again for the liberation from the Austrian yoke of the 'Czech allies.' Benes explained to them the importance that Masaryk laid on the people in Prague issuing some kind of proclamation that he was entitled to act on behalf of the Czech nation. All agreed, even Kramar, to the drawing up of such a proclamation. Suddenly

the telephone bell rang, and Scheiner was called to the telephone to be informed that the police were searching his house.

The gathering was immediately thrown into confusion. As if to demonstrate his solidarity with them Kramar, although the first to leave, picked up a copy of *La Nation Tchèque* from the table, and thrust it into his coat pocket. Rasin and Haju followed him. Samal, Scheiner and Benes stayed behind and hastily burnt all incriminating papers, and held a council of war as to what was best to do. They urged Scheiner to flee, and Scheiner, after a great deal of hesitation, agreed. Samal gave him all the money he had in the house, and he left. Benes left after a little delay, in the full expectation that he was also due for arrest. The next day he was informed that both Kramar and Scheiner had been arrested, Kramar just as he was about to enter his villa, and the police had handed him over to the military authorities. The examining magistrate had retained the copy of *La Nation Tchèque* found in the breast-pocket of his overcoat, as an important piece of evidence for the crown. Scheiner had been arrested at the same time.

Benes' own safety was now obviously threatened. Before leaving his house the next morning he looked carefully round for signs of

danger, and spent the rest of the day in hiding, awaiting developments. It was not until late in the evening that he ventured back home. So far no steps had been taken against him, but he realised that it was only a matter of time. He accordingly began, methodically as always, to make his preparations for departure. His first care was to destroy everything of an incriminating nature. A collection of books which he treasured and had no desire to lose, he deposited with Olic, the father of the girl he had known in his student days at Paris, who was still a police officer, and his next door neighbour. He also put all Masaryk's property in safe keeping. Almost every day he met Rasin, to discuss the situation. On the 12th July he failed to find him, and enquiries at the editorial offices of *Narodni Listy*, the paper for which Rasin worked, elicited the fact that Rasin had been arrested that morning and taken off to Vienna. The last steps had now to be taken. It was obviously useless and foolhardy for Benes to hold on any longer. With great care, as the vigilance and experience of the police was increasing day by day, he forged a passport for himself. He called himself Miroslav Sichá, and gave his nationality as Austrian. He described himself as a traveller in optical apparatus. He presented himself at the



German Consulate, armed with this passport, and asked for a visa for Germany, and another to be allowed out over the Swiss frontier. He gave as reasons for his desire to travel, the necessity for him to examine the latest improvements in optical apparatus in Germany, and to maintain or renew business contacts in Switzerland. He was given his visas.

He then went into the country to spend the last few days with his wife. It was hard indeed for him to leave the only personal friend he had in the world, to leave her, too, under circumstances in which she might even be seized and punished as a hostage for his conduct. But duty to his country came first; he tried to comfort her by saying it would not be more than two years at the outside before he returned to her. Actually it was four, but when he returned, he returned as a great national hero, and the second most important person in the country, with the whole population crowding to welcome him, and do him honour. Crossing the frontier at Eger was still not without its risks, skilfully forged though his passport was; but a friend who wore the uniform of an Austrian Medical Officer, saw him safely over the border, 'after some difficulty,' as he records, and he set off for Friedrichshafen, on the shores of Lake

Constance. Here the German military authorities put him through a nerve-racking cross-examination, but the training he had been through in the last twelve months of constant mortal danger had given him nerves of steel, and he passed safely through the ordeal. At six o'clock in the morning of 3rd September, 1915, he landed safely on Swiss soil, and immediately sent off to his wife the pre-arranged telegram reassuring her of his safe arrival.

Thus closed one of the strangest chapters in the history of Dr. Eduard Benes, Professor of Economics—surely one of the strangest in the life of any university professor since the world began. It had not been pleasant for him to have to behave as a sensational criminal, but he had accepted it all as part of the great work in hand. With his usual dry clarity of analysis he has set down for us the sensations and effects of being a spy : "Conspiracy, by the *Milieu* it creates, by its methods, its work, involving secret and spy service, dealings direct and indirect with the police, tempers the character, particularly in the case of young people : it whets the intellect and necessitates reflection, attention, foresight, quickness of decision, a knowledge of the psychology of men and things. It is a real school of life for anyone who is capable of

observing and then making use of what he has picked up. One learns to be brave in that school, the courage of heart and head are raised to the point of allowing oneself to be sacrificed with the most stoical calm. Conspirators easily develop into fanatics, and fanatics are accustomed to see things from one point of view only, viz., that which their secret wishes force upon them. I have experienced all this, and have watched at very close quarters all my fellow-conspirators. I had already done my apprenticeship in Russian novels; now I brought myself to perfection by practice and the study of my fellow-workers."

## PROPAGANDIST AND POLITICIAN

ON the evening of the same day on which he arrived in Switzerland at 9 o'clock in the 'Eause-Vives,' at Geneva, Benes met Masaryk again, and brought him the news he most greatly desired to hear, viz., that Benes had succeeded in persuading his fellow-conspirators to agree to open hostility to Austria. Masaryk was overjoyed, and immediately described to

Benes his plan of operation. For this it was necessary for Benes to establish himself in France. Masaryk was sure that no one could handle Paris for the Czechs better than Benes. Benes stayed only a fortnight in Geneva, where he was introduced to several important people, including Bebirow, the Russian Minister in Berne, whose wife was Czech, and on the 16th of September went to Paris.

In Paris he took a small flat, consisting of two rooms and a kitchen, at number 7, La rue Leopold-Robert, and settled down to work. Funds were still scarce, so that he had to live as modestly as he had done in the old days when he was first in Paris as a student. He planned his work in his usual methodical way. His first main tasks were three: he had to persuade the Czech colony in Paris gradually to accept his authority, he had to enlighten the French people on the subject of Czechoslovakia, and he had finally to create in Paris a centre which would co-ordinate the scattered and sporadic activities of Czechs and Slovaks throughout the world. Herculean tasks: but here was a Hercules to deal with them.

His first task he decided would be best accomplished by time and tact. If he did not push himself to the fore, and made no endeavour to seize control of, or interfere with, existing Czech organisations in Paris, he was

convinced they would, sooner or later, recognise his own special position, backed by the authority of Masaryk, the most respected Czech alive, and come round voluntarily, without feeling that they had been in any way forced to do so. The third task was impossible of achievement until he had accomplished the second, so that it was on this that he first concentrated. The first step was obviously to try and take up again the threads of pre-war acquaintances. Many of his old friends in Paris had disappeared, but enough remained to make a good beginning, and some of these were now in very influential positions. One of the most useful of these was Albert Thomas, who was Minister for Munitions, another was de Lagardelle. Both of these he knew through his former journalistic work for the French Socialist Press. Other old friends were Professor Denis, and Professor Louis Eisenmann, who had been at Dijon when Benes studied for his doctorate there, and who was now attached to the French Intelligence Service. He made new acquaintanceships, too. In the *atelier* of the Czech painter, Striml, he met de Quirielle, Editor of the *Journal des Debats*, and he again introduced him to one of the most influential journalists in Paris, Auguste Gauvain, foreign correspondent of the same paper. Eisenmann introduced him to the War

Ministry, and a Socialist journalist, Paul Louis, to many influential officials from the Foreign Office. Benes knew very well how important it was to have the journalists on his side, and he knew also what wins a journalist's heart—news. He himself got news through from Vienna, by devious routes, to which they had no access, and he distributed it among them, generously but judiciously. Slowly he became known among the best journalists as a man upon whom one could always depend for some titbit of news. Dubosq of the *Temps*, and Jules Sauerwein of the *Matin* were two fish he caught with this bait. Through these unwitting agents he was able to create a propitious psychological atmosphere for Czech propaganda in France. Among the items of news he dished out were, frequently, indicatory of Austrian mistreatment of Czechs and of the other Slav minorities.

In the meanwhile he was not neglecting his first task of making himself leader of the Paris Czech colony unobtrusively. He was extremely anxious to get the manifesto which he had with such great difficulty persuaded his Prague fellow-plotters to draw up and accede to. The difficulty lay chiefly in finding and chasing signatories. Benes' tact here was admirable. He explained he did not wish to sign it himself—he was simply working to get it published,

but other, more influential and better known people must sign it, for it to have any weight. Eventually a committee was formed to provide signatures and Benes had won his first great fight in establishing his position in Paris, although no one but himself knew that he had won, or even that he had been fighting. A 'Czechoslovak Foreign Committee' was now in being to represent the Czechs not only of Paris, but also of London, America, Russia, and elsewhere, and the manifesto was signed by representatives of every important Czech organisation outside Czechoslovakia. The manifesto was revised and altered by Denis, who told Benes that the style and arrangement of the original draft would not appeal to the French public. The influence that Benes had by now acquired with French journalists made it easy for him to arrange for the manifesto to be published by the French newspapers on 14th November, 1915. The manifesto simply stated that the Czechs and Slovaks claimed the right to an historical State of their own, and that the whole nation was ready to fight for this right. It created little stir on its appearance, but its appearance was nevertheless an historical event, because it was an open declaration of war.

Shortly after the publication of the manifesto, Benes had to go to London, to discuss

things with Masaryk, and to be introduced by him to prominent English people, particularly Wickham Steed and Seton-Watson, and give them information as to the progress of the work in Paris. He had hardly returned to Paris when an urgent message from Masaryk sent him flying off to Geneva and Berne. One of the links in the chain of communication with Prague had been arrested in that city, and it was necessary to forge the chain anew. This task accomplished, Benes returned to Prague to go on with his interrupted tasks. He had now reached the point in his propaganda where deeds had to be produced. Interest had been aroused, and now he had to be prepared to show that the Czech nation of which he had been making so much fuss, was not a myth, but a hard fact, and one which could prove of practical use to the French cause. He had already succeeded, or rather the already existing organisations, with which he was so careful not openly to interfere, had already succeeded in raising fighting units among the Czech colonists, but these had been drafted into French regiments, where they were lost. It was not at all what Benes was after. He wished to create a distinct Czech legion to impress upon the people that there was such a thing as a Czech nation. And on



his return to Paris he found just the man to help him.

The very day of his return from Switzerland, 13th December, 1915, Benes went to see his old friend Striml at his studio. Striml introduced him to a man slightly older than himself, whose name was Stefanik. It turned out that they were old friends. They had met in Paris ten years previously, when both were studying, Benes political economy, and Stefanik astronomy. Despite the great differences between them of character, nature, birth and education, they had somehow been attracted to one another. After completing his studies in Paris, Stefanik had made a name for himself as an astronomer, particularly in the French colonies, and had become a French citizen. Immediately on the outbreak of war, he had joined the French Air Force as a volunteer. As soon as he heard what Benes was doing, he enthusiastically promised his support as a Slovak. Stefanik was just as much a typical and pure Slovak as Benes was a Czech. Benes immediately saw of what value this man might be to his cause, both as a Slovak, and as a military man, to help him in the creation and organisation of the Czech fighting legions. He had shortly to go to Holland, to meet Masaryk, to arrange a new

point of contact with Prague, through the wife of the great Czech painter, Filla, then residing in Holland, and there he informed Masaryk of Stefanik's offer.

The time was now ripe for the formation of a more permanent and more authoritative centre of activity than the ' Foreign Committee,' and Benes was clever enough to arrange things in such a way that the suggestion should not come from him himself. It was Stefanik who proposed that Czechoslovak propaganda be carried on by a recognisable body, and not by a vague and amorphous body ; by one clearly constituted, and with responsible leaders, and not by an anonymous association. Stefanik, too, proposed the title of the new organisation — ' Le Conseil National des Pays, Tcheques.' The word Slovak was intentionally left out. French notions of geography were very vague indeed, and Stefanik argued that it was better not to confuse people by introducing a new idea ; he also pointed out that the very fact that he, a Slovak, had proposed this name for the committee would in itself be a proof of Czecho-Slovak unity. The committee was accordingly formed. Masaryk was appointed president, with Dürich and Stefanik as vice-presidents. Benes was made general secretary and the officers of the general secretariat were at number 7, de la rue Leopold-Robert. Thus

Benes secured for himself all the real power—he *was* the National Council—while not offending anybody by thrusting his name into prominence. From this moment on all Benes' energies were concentrated on the double task of getting the National Council recognised by the Allies as the provisional government of a State in embryo, having authority to speak and make decisions on behalf of the Czech and Slovak peoples, and on getting his own people in Bohemia to give it the support and recognition which alone could make this claim valid.

It was uphill work. The Czechs were by tradition and historical conditions a people intolerant and suspicious of authority. The committee nearly broke up in its infancy when Dürich tried to play the dictator. The danger was averted, and Dürich removed from his office. Benes was clear in his own mind that in the 'National Council' and in the 'National Council' alone lay the genesis of the new independence he was determined to win for his country. By fair means or by foul, by exerting all the resources of his body and brain to their utmost capacity, by diplomacy, by propaganda, by intrigues, cajolery, and even trickery, he was determined to keep the 'National Council' in existence, and make it the instrument for freeing his country from

the Austrian yoke—with himself always as its general secretary, of course.

His easiest task, and the first accomplished, was to get all Czechs and Slovaks resident outside Czechoslovakia to recognise the Council. With the Paris colony he followed the tactics he had adopted from the first—'Time and tact'—and as the National Council grew in importance, the colony came to accept it automatically, although at first there had been a certain amount of opposition. The only real opposition he met with was in Russia. For the rest of the world, the name of Masaryk was sufficient. But the Russian Czechs had a grudge against Masaryk. They knew he had opposed the idea of looking to Russia for support, and they resented it; of Benes they knew nothing. But gradually they came to realise what the 'National Council' meant to the Czech cause, and on 6th May, 1917, a congress of Russian Czechs held at Kiev unanimously passed a resolution acknowledging the National Council, with Masaryk at its head, as the supreme organ of the Czechoslovak National Council, and calling upon every Czech and every Slovak to obey its orders as their plain duty.

The first victory in the battle for recognition by the Allies was won when Masaryk in the first week of January, 1916, as the result of

Benes' intrigues, obtained an audience with Briand, at that time Prime Minister, in the course of which Briand gave Masaryk the assurance that "France will never remain indifferent to the fate of the Czech people." It was vague, but at least the most important man in France had recognised that the Czechs had a case, and that the 'National Council' had a right to put that case on their behalf. Benes was not satisfied with this. He wanted something more concrete to convince people at home that they really could count on the support of the Allies. He succeeded in getting Berthelot, the power behind the throne at the French Foreign Office, interested, and by a supreme effort, succeeded in having inserted—as an amendment—in the Allied reply to President Wilson's note, delivered to the United States on the 10th January, 1917, a clause demanding the freedom of the Italians, Slavs, Russians, and Czechoslovaks, who were living under foreign domination.

It was a great victory, but was almost turned into a Pyrrhic one by the cowardice of the Czech delegates to the Parliament at Vienna. It was difficult for the people in Bohemia. Even those who were in full sympathy with the 'National Council' were afraid to show their hand. They were faced, let it not be forgotten, with the threat of a traitor's

death, should they openly declare their sympathy. Benes knew that very well of course, but open action on the part of at least the Czech members of the Vienna Parliament was essential, if the Allies were to be convinced that the 'National Council' was something more than the expression of the revolt of a few exiled Czechs and of Czechs resident abroad. The Austrian Government, too, had not been slow to see the significance of the amendment to the Allied note, and took immediate steps to counteract it. Pressure was brought to bear on the Czech M.P.s. They yielded to it, and on 30th January, 1917, a body of them under the name of, 'The League of Czech Deputies,' passed the following resolution: "With regard to the reply of the Entente States to President Wilson, in which it is declared that among the war aims of the countries fighting against our Monarchy is the liberation of the Czechs from foreign rule, the presidency of the Czech League repudiates this insinuation, which is based upon entirely false suppositions, and it emphatically proclaims that as always in the past, so, too, at the present time and also in the future, the Czech nation envisages the conditions of its development only beneath the sceptre of the Hapsburgs." This was, indeed, a deadly blow, and Benes had to use all his ingenuity to parry

it. He was helped by America's declaration of war on Germany on the 4th April, 1917. Shortly after Benes sent a message to the Czech deputies, which ran as follows: "The present situation makes it imperative for us to show whether it is the dynasty and the diplomats or whether it is the nations themselves who are entitled to negotiate on behalf of the Austrian nation. Unless you make it clear at the present moment that the dynasty and its diplomats are not entitled to do so, we are lost. I repeat, therefore, that these things are essential for our preservation, which to-day rests in your hands:

- (1) Not to vote with the Government on any point.
- (2) Not to be present at the manifestations of loyalty in Parliament.
- (3) The Radicals, at least, if not all, must set up a passive opposition.
- (4) Not to disavow us, and
- (5) To demand State rights.

Whatever you do, there must be no repetition of the mistake made in 1848. None of you must vindicate the existence of Austria. Remember that there is a revolution in Russia, and that Russia will be a republic."

Benes followed up this message with another move to impress on the Czech Deputies that

they must now take action. He persuaded the Czech poet and dramatist Jaroslav Kvapil to organise a deputation of 150 Czech writers to call on the Deputies and demand that they express in Parliament the real will of the Czech nation. On the 29th of May, 1917, the 'National Council' issued a manifesto protesting that the sessions of the Parliament at Vienna were illegal. The result of all this was that on the opening day of Parliament, the Czech League proposed a resolution which demanded State rights and the application of the principle of self-determination. They announced the decision of the Czechs and Slovaks to form a united democratic State. Benes was now happy about the standing of the 'National Council' at home, and was free to turn his attention to the problems of making it and its aim popular with the Allies.

The Ally that looked upon Czechoslovak aspirations with the deepest suspicion was Italy. Italy was particularly jealous of the future Yugoslavia and feared that Czechoslovak co-operation would strengthen her. Benes determined to conciliate the Italian Government. He went to Italy and established contact with Baron Sonnino, the most powerful man in Italian politics during the war. Negotiations were slow and difficult—the Italians were distrustful. His second visit to



Italy was more successful. It was undertaken expressly at the wish of the Baron Sonnino, and Benes remained there more than a fortnight. He was introduced to the Italian Home Secretary, and got to know Sir Samuel Hoare, who was later very useful to him in his efforts to arouse the British Foreign Office. He met also for the first time the Serbian Prime Minister, Pasic, and entered into negotiations with him. His efforts finally met with open success when a public banquet was held in Benes' honour, to promote the liberation of Czechoslovakia. Most of the leading Italian politicians spoke on behalf of Czechoslovakia at this banquet. The banquet was the outward recognition of Benes' work in Rome, but the real importance of this visit lay in Benes' interviews with Giardino, the Italian Minister for War, and with Sonnino himself. Benes succeeded in obtaining from them the recognition of the validity of the National Council's claim to make decisions in military and political matters. They further promised to give serious consideration to the question of the formation of a Czechoslovak Army. There now remained the London nut to crack. Benes went straight from Rome to London. Sir Samuel Hoare had given him a letter of introduction to Robert Cecil, Minister in charge of the blockade, and Benes handed

him a long and detailed memorandum dealing with the Czechoslovak problems. He did not attempt to do more than convey information on this occasion. He knew it would take time to thaw British indifference. The ignorance of Britain on matters Central-European was too vast to be dealt with in one attempt.

On his return to Paris he threw himself with renewed violence into his other great task, the creation of the Czechoslovak Army. Czech prisoners-of-war had to be collected from Russia, Serbia, and Italy, and, most difficult of all, the official attitude of distrust and disapproval at the French War Office had to be changed. Stefanik undertook the task of bringing back the Czechs in Russia, and after a long struggle Benes succeeded in getting Stefanik's mission officially recognised. But despite promises of high officials and assurances that everything was awaiting the official decree, Benes' offer of "Tens of thousands of troops" to fight on the Allied side was not definitely accepted in any form acceptable or useful to Benes, although Briand, in 1916, agreed *in principle* to the creation of the Czechoslovak Army. What had held Briand, and later Ribot and Painlevé, back was the hopes the Allies entertained, after the death of the old Emperor Franz Joseph, on 21st November, 1916, of making a separate peace

with the new Emperor Karl. This would have meant the end of all Benes' dreams of an independent Czechoslovakia. Had the Allies been able to conclude this separate peace with Austria, their promises to the subject peoples of the Empire, indefinite as yet, anyhow, and binding only in so far as a politician's conscience is sensitive to honour without legal compulsion, would certainly have been broken to secure it. Luckily for Benes and his plans, the Emperor Karl showed great willingness to give away or return everything that was not his to give and which he had not taken, but an invincible opposition to parting with anything that was his own—more, he even wished to have additions made to his own possessions ; the secret of the negotiations leaked out prematurely, and the 'Tiger,' enemy of all attempts at compromise, determined to fight to the death and crush Germany and her Ally, came into power in France. Thirty days after he had come into office, Clemenceau published his decree, accepting Benes' offer. The proclamation read as follows :

" Art. I. The Czechoslovaks, organised in an independent army, and acknowledging the authority of the supreme French Command in military affairs, will fight under their own flag against the Central Powers.

" Art. II. In all political respects the management of this national army devolves upon the National Council of the Czech and Slovak territories, with headquarters in Paris.

" Art. III. The equipment of the Czechoslovak Army, as well as its further activity, is ensured by the French Government.

" Art. IV. As regards its organisation, control, administration and legal jurisdiction, the same regulations will apply to the Czechoslovak Army as are current in the French Army.

" Art. V. The independent Czechoslovak Army will be recruited from :

- (i) Czechoslovaks now serving in the French Army.
- (ii) Czechoslovaks serving elsewhere, in so far as they are granted permission to be transferred to the Czechoslovak Army, and also volunteers for the duration of the war.

" Art. VI. This decree will be carried out in accordance with ministerial instructions, which are to be issued later.

" Art. VII. The Prime Minister, the Minister of War, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, are each requested to carry this decree into effect, as far as it applies to himself, and it will be published in the official gazette of

the French Republic, and printed in the bulletin of laws.

“ Given at Paris, 16th December, 1917.

R. POINCARÉ,  
*President of the Republic.*

G. CLEMENCEAU,  
*Prime Minister and Minister of  
War.*

S. PICHON,  
*Minister of Foreign Affairs.”*

At the moment of its proclamation this decree was more in the nature of a political gesture than anything else, as the number of Czechoslovaks in France, even supplemented by volunteers from America and transports from Russia, was far too small to form a really independent fighting force; but its moral value for Benes was invaluable. The authority of the ‘ National Council ’ to act as the representative of the Czech and Slovak people was again confirmed and emphasised. It was in virtue of this decree that Masaryk, on the 7th February, 1918, when the first treaty of Brest-Litovsk was being arranged, was able to save the Czech legions in Russia, by issuing a proclamation, as President of the ‘ National Council,’ to the effect that all Czech troops in Russia formed part of the Czechoslovak Army in France. As a result of this proclamation,

Masaryk was able to obtain assurances that the armed neutrality of Czechoslovak forces in Russia was recognised. This decree was implemented on 7th February, 1918, when the statutes of the Czechoslovak Army were published and signed by Clemenceau and Benes. This document was of even more vital importance than the preceding presidential decree. For Benes there was the great personal triumph of his signature appearing alongside Clemenceau's on a document of such importance and for the cause of the 'National Council' the definite recognition of them as an independent power, comprising both Czechs and Slovaks.

But the goal was still far ahead, and there could be no relaxing of the untiring efforts of Benes. He continued his task of spreading information. The number of important people, journalists, politicians and statesmen he interviewed in 1918 was incredible; to enumerate them would take pages; they included Yugoslavs, Poles and Russians, the embassies of Britain, Italy and France, and official people and journalists of almost every Allied and neutral country. But his chief fires were directed against London. Lloyd George was perhaps more enthusiastic about coming to terms with Austria-Hungary than any other Allied statesmen. Somehow he had to be won

over, as Benes, always informed of every detail, knew that he was by far the most powerful personality in the British Cabinet at this time. As usual, he attained his objective by the method of indirect approach. On the 25th April he had a long conversation with Clemenceau, the ostensible ground for which was the problem of transporting Czech troops from Russia. Actually he made use of the opportunity to discuss the whole Czechoslovak problem in detail with Clemenceau, and extorted a promise from the latter that France would very shortly recognise the independence of the Czechoslovaks, and acknowledge the 'National Council' as their government. With this assurance in his pocket, he went over to England. Here Masaryk's daughter, Olga, was of invaluable assistance to him, with her knowledge of English psychology and methods. He obtained interviews with Lord Robert Cecil, Lord Milner, and Lord Balfour. With the last-named he left two careful memoranda, giving a history of the independence movement of the Czechoslovaks, and of the 'National Council,' and making great play with the recognition he had already won for both in Italy and France. The result was a communication from the Foreign Office on 3rd June, 1918, signed by Lord Balfour, which read as follows :

"Sir,—In reply to the memoranda with which you were so good as to furnish me on the 10th and 11th inst., I have the honour to assure you that His Majesty's Government, who have every possible sympathy with the Czechoslovak movement, will be glad to give the same recognition to this movement as has been granted by the Governments of France and Italy.

"His Majesty's Government will thus be prepared to recognise the Czechoslovak National Council as the supreme organ of the Czechoslovak movement in the Allied countries, and they will also be prepared to recognise the Czechoslovak Army as an organised unit, operating in the Allied cause, and to attach thereto a British liaison officer so soon as the need for this may arise.

"His Majesty's Government will at the same time be prepared to accord to the National Council political rights concerning the civil affairs of Czechoslovaks similar to those already accorded to the Polish National Committee.

"I have to add that the above decisions have been communicated to the Allied Governments concerned. I am, Sir, your obedient servant, ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR."

On his return to France, Benes wasted no time before going to acquaint the French



ministers with the results of his London mission. The very next day after his arrival he spoke to Berthelot and Pichon, and on the following day to Clemenceau, who renewed his promise to recognise the National Council and the Czech State, but referred Benes to Pichon for details. But despite the utmost efforts, Benes could not extract from Pichon a direct declaration of this recognition. Benes felt that it was now or never. His fear now was not that the Allies would win, but that they would win too quickly. His aim now was to obtain for his nation "a binding political and diplomatic charter as a responsible government which would give us a full and final recognition of national independence and sovereignty," *before the war ended*. He knew all the difficulties and rivalries which would attend the peace settlement; he was well aware that promises given under the stress of war are likely to be revised when the cold business of peace-treaty making begins. He wanted to have ready for the future Peace Conference a *fait accompli* which could not be denied or disowned. So he battered away at the opposition.

On the 29th June, 1918, the opposition capitulated, and Benes received from Pichon, Minister of Foreign Affairs for France, an official note which stirred even this dry,

unemotional professor of economics. He read it, he tells us, over and over, while the tears rolled down his face. The fight was won. Czechoslovakia had won her freedom. Only the details were now to be arranged. The note said : " The Government of the Republic will do all in its power in order, when the moment arrives, to fulfil your aspirations for independence within the historical frontiers of your territory." This note was given dramatic and conspicuous publicity the following day at the military review which took place at Darney. Three French Cabinet Ministers, the military attachés of all the Allied countries and a number of distinguished generals were present at the review, and the President, M. Poincaré, to present to the 21st Czechoslovak Regiment their colours. Benes spoke his thanks on behalf of the ' National Council ' and the Czechoslovak nation. It was the greatest moment of his life up to this date. He writes : " It was the first time that our struggle for independence had placed me in an official post of such importance that I was, in fact, the representative of the Czech nation. The impression it made on me was so strong as to convince me that everything had been won ; the slightest thing seemed to me a sign, a proof, a pledge of the victory we were about to win ; I believed that nothing could go amiss for me after this."

Nor did anything. Directly after the review Pichon sent a telegram to the British Prime Minister, Lord Balfour, saying that "France has recognised the National Council and will support devotedly and loyally the claims to independence for which the Czechoslovak soldiers are fighting in the ranks of the Allies." Balfour sent a telegram in reply in which he stated that the British Government fully concurred in the sentiments so wonderfully expressed in the speech of the President of the Republic, and emphasised that the handing over of the colours was not only an interesting military event, but also a political one of far-reaching consequences, as it represented a stage in the great fight for the freedom and security of the small nations.

This was followed by a message from America where Masaryk had been busy, which informed Benes that on the 28th of June, the Secretary of State, in view of the efforts of the Austrian and German authorities to twist the real meaning of the declaration of 29th May, had declared that the intentions of the United States were to the effect that "All peoples belonging to the Slav races had to be freed from the Austrian yoke."

Success only acted as a spur to Benes' activity. Since the Pichon note he was invited to all official receptions in France, with full

diplomatic ceremony, as the representative of the independent Czechoslovak Republic. But he was determined to obtain from the other Allies, too, a recognition of the 'National Council' in a form which would leave no room for doubt. He wished to give the National Council such legal standing as would allow it to take its place in the peace talks alongside the other Allies. He again tried to secure an unequivocal statement from the British Government. He had two conversations with Balfour, and discussed all details of the case with Cecil on several occasions. As usual he handed them well-prepared memoranda. At last he persuaded Balfour to come out on 9th August with a declaration in which the British Government declared :

" Since the beginning of the war the Czechoslovak nation has resisted the common enemy by every means in its power. The Czechoslovaks have constituted a considerable army, fighting on three different battlefields, and attempting, in Russia and Siberia, to arrest the Germanic invasion.

" In consideration of its efforts to achieve independence, Great Britain regards the Czechoslovaks as an Allied nation, and recognises the unity of the three Czechoslovak armies as an Allied and belligerent army

waging regular warfare against Austria-Hungary and Germany.

"Great Britain also recognises the right of the Czechoslovak National Council as the supreme organ of the Czechoslovak national interests, and as the present trustee of the future Czechoslovak Government, to exercise supreme authority over this Allied and belligerent army.

"9th August, 1918. A. J. BALFOUR."

Having achieved this signal success, which placed the legality and international status of his country and his Council beyond question, Benes appealed for the recognition of the most distant Ally—Japan. He therefore called on Japan's ambassador to London, M. Clunda, and left with him one of his inevitable memoranda. The result was that on 11th September, 1918, he was informed that Japan also had recognised the 'National Council' and regarded Czechoslovakia as a military and political Ally.

All the careful work of Masaryk and Benes now bore its fruit. Like ripe peaches, triumph after triumph fell into Benes' hands. On the 3rd September Benes signed the Convention in London defining the details of Great Britain's recognition. Among these details were: that the British Government recognised the 'National Council' as the *de facto* Government; that passports issued by the

'National Council' would be valid ; that the 'National Council' might appoint a diplomatic representative to the British Government ; that the British Government was ready to consider taking part in a loan to Czechoslovakia ; and, most important of all, " His Majesty's Government recognise the right of the Czechoslovak National Council to be represented at every conference of the Allied Powers at which questions touching the interests of Czechoslovakia are discussed." The day before this, 2nd September, was published in America an even more categorical assertion of the rights of Czechoslovakia and of the 'National Council.' Benes hurried back to Paris to persuade the French Government to publish an agreement with the 'National Council' similar to the one achieved with the British Government on 9th August. While negotiations were in progress, Benes cabled to Masaryk in America, appealing to him, in view of the general situation, to turn the National Council into a regular Government. Masaryk's answer, containing his assent to this, arrived on the 26th September. On the 28th September, Benes signed the Franco-Czech agreement, which contained, besides the clause that the French Government acknowledged the Czechoslovak nation's right to be represented at the international conferences where

questions touching her interests were to be discussed, the reaffirmation of France's intention to see that Czechoslovakia's frontiers should be those of the former Historic Lands. There remained only Italy. After handing to the Italian ambassador a memorandum for Orlando, the Prime Minister, he set out on 1st October for Italy. He missed Orlando and Sonnino, who had both gone to Paris while Benes was reviewing the Czechoslovak legions on the Italian front; but, before leaving, Orlando had issued a proclamation stating that the Convention of 21st April, 1918, was equivalent to a distinct recognition of the Czechoslovak National Council as *de facto* Government. Benes lingered on a few days to settle with the Italian Foreign Office questions of detail arising out of the new situation, but was recalled in haste to Paris by Dr. Sychrava on the 10th October. He arrived on the 13th to find that events were developing with such rapidity that he could not delay the proclaiming of the interim government any longer. For sentimental reasons he had intended to form this government on 8th November, the anniversary of the Battle of Bila Hora (White Mountain), but Benes was no man to risk spoiling his plans for the sake of sentiment. He succeeded in obtaining the approval of the French Foreign Office for a note handed to

each of the Allied Governments informing them that, "According to a decision taken on the 26th December, the Czechoslovak Interim Government, having its seat in Paris, has constituted itself as follows: T. G. Masaryk. President of the Interim Government, Chairman of the Ministerial Council, and Minister of Finance; E. Benes. Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Minister of the Interior; M. Stefanik, Minister for War."

The French Government acknowledged the newly-constituted Government on the 15th October, and within the next few days the rest of the Allied countries followed suit. By the 24th it had been accepted without reservations by all the Allied Governments. On the 14th October, then, Benes' self-appointed task was accomplished; he laid down his office of General Secretary, and on the 15th became first Minister for Foreign Affairs of the new Czechoslovak State. He could well be proud of the results of his labour.

The new Government immediately proceeded to appoint representatives of the new State to the Allied Governments. M. Stefan Osousky was appointed Czechoslovak *chargé d'affaires* in London, M. Leo Sychrava in Paris, M. Leo Borsky in Rome, M. Charles Pergler in Washington, and M. Gottlieb Parlu in Moscow. In the meantime, Austria, in a last desperate



effort to save her empire, had appealed to Washington for an armistice. In President Wilson's reply he made it perfectly clear that the United States had recognised Czechoslovakia as an independent State, and Austria submitted. On the 23rd October, 1918, the Austrian Government accorded permission to the leading Czech politicians to go abroad and get into communication with the members of the Interim Czech Government.

On the 28th of October, 1918, Benes arrived at Geneva to meet the delegates from Prague. The atmosphere was a little strained. The delegates from Prague had not yet decided what was to be the form of the constitution. Benes had. He had already discussed it with Masaryk's friends, Stanck, Klofac, Kalina and Habrman, and they had all agreed that the new State was to be a republic, with Masaryk as its President. But Kramar wanted a constitutional monarchy. He still had dreams of the return of the Romanovs, and a family alliance with the Russian brother would be possible, at least, if there were a king in Bohemia. He discussed with Benes the possibility of asking a Russian Grand Duke to accept the crown of Bohemia, or possibly the Duke of Connaught. Benes had to use all the tact he possessed. Gently he explained to Kramar that the question was really no longer

open to discussion ; keeping himself, as usual, prudently in the background, he declared it was the will of the legions, who had fought on the Allied fronts, the wish of the Allied Governments, and demanded by the political situation of their new-born country, that the Government should take the form of a republic with Masaryk as its President and Kramar President of the Council. Ill pleased, but impotent, Kramar gave in and accepted office. Benes immediately cabled to Masaryk asking him to authorise Dr. Kramar to sign State documents in his name. Masaryk cabled his assent by return.

Kramar's opposition overcome, the rest was easy. The delegates unanimously agreed to approve of everything that had been done in the name of the Czechs by the 'National Council,' or the Interim Government, and to accept all undertakings past, present, or future, given to the Allies by the 'National Council' in the name of the Czechoslovak State. The appointments of Masaryk as first President of the Republic, Kramar as Prime Minister, and Benes as Minister for Foreign Affairs were also confirmed. The last 't' was crossed, the last 'i' dotted. Benes was now in the office he was to hold for seventeen years.

## FOREIGN SECRETARY AND EUROPEAN STATESMAN

THE first gigantic task that faced the new Foreign Secretary was the settlement of the frontiers of the new State, and of the relations of the new State to its neighbours and the rest of Europe. He had already insisted on the express mention of the right of Czechoslovakia to be represented at all conferences at which matters touching her interests were to be dealt with, in the agreements drawn up between the National Government and the various Allied Governments. But he found that he had to fight to get this principle carried out. He was determined to attend the meetings of the Allies to consider the terms of the Armistice, and finally succeeded in convincing Berthelot that it was necessary. This step made Czechoslovakia one of the major belligerent powers whose wishes had to be considered, and so successful was Benes in his attempts to ensure the sovereign rights of Czechoslovakia, that minutes of previous meetings, held while Benes was still at Geneva, were submitted for his approval, as representative of his Government. Furthermore, when

Marshal Foch handed to the Central Powers the text of the Armistice, it was expressly stated that it was submitted also on behalf of the provisional authorities of Czechoslovakia. It is significant that Czechoslovakia was the only one of the new States to take part in the Armistice negotiations.

The scope of this little book does not allow of a detailed account of Benes' actions as Secretary for Foreign Affairs. An attempt will be made to give only a coherent picture of what he accomplished during these seventeen years. And one very important—almost the most important—question he had to settle with his neighbours, we shall leave to the last chapter—the German minority question. The reasons for thus segregating this question will become obvious later.

Benes' work as Foreign Secretary falls roughly into three sections: from 1918-1923, his energies were chiefly concentrated on securing the frontiers of the State; from 1924-1929, he was busy trying to liquidate the economic and psychological problems of the aftermath of war; from 1925-1929, seeing that efforts to clear the atmosphere in Europe were not likely to lead to any permanent success for the while, he turned his attention to the creation of a collective security system, to save Europe from collapse and destruction.

Benes' first objective was to clear the Czechoslovak State of foreign troops. After having gained the right to attend all meetings of the Allies on questions concerning the peace settlement, Benes attended every meeting at Versailles. This meant that the Foreign Secretary was unable to go back to his country for two years. It was an unparalleled situation but Benes knew what he was about. It was due to his efforts that the provisional frontiers of Slovakia were fixed as early as December, 1918. This despite the fact that Hungary's clever negotiator, Karolji, had for a moment persuaded the Allied Commission to agree that Hungary should remain intact under the Hungarian Government until the final decision as to its frontiers had been made. Benes made energetic protests to the French Foreign Secretary, and by a note of Pichon's, dated 21st December, 1918, the new frontiers of Slovakia were defined, and Hungarian troops had been withdrawn beyond them. The same note also stated that, until the decision of the Peace Congress had been arrived at, according to the terms of her agreements with the Allies, Czechoslovakia must be allowed to occupy the historic provinces of Bohemia, Moravia and Austrian Silesia.

Benes' task at the Peace Conference was

complicated by the whole atmosphere of confusion, intrigue and indecision that hung over it. The Allies had conflicting interests and no comprehensive plan; the creation of all the new States gave rise to innumerable unforeseen problems and all the issues were affected by the Bolshevik revolution and the Western Powers' terror that it should spread. Benes was sure of the few people who knew exactly what he wanted—and therefore got it. The only points he failed to carry were the corridor to Yugoslavia, which was categorically rejected by Italy, and his efforts on behalf of the Lausitz Wends. Italian opposition to the incorporation of Ruthenia, however, was overcome. The problem of reparations was not settled to Benes' entire satisfaction, but the terms he obtained were very much better than those originally proposed.

The most unpleasant and dangerous of all the problems with which Benes' was faced at the Peace Conference was that of Czechoslovakia's common frontier with Poland. Here he met with bitter opposition on the part of Poland, and France, for once took the side of Poland, whom she wished to see as a strong bulwark against the Bolsheviks. After trying out all his guns Benes at last, in agreement with Kramar and the Government, accepted a plebiscite.

The situation of the Czech legions in Russia was the next difficulty. Benes wished to get them home as quickly as possible, but the Allies, particularly England, were all for armed intervention in Russia, and the legions were under the military command of Marshal Foch. On this question, too, Benes had a serious dispute—the first of a series—with Kramar, who supported the English point of view. The position was rendered all the more difficult by the fact that the legionaries themselves were not in favour of the counter-revolutionary movement. Stefanik returned and after his report had been heard, Marshal Foch gave orders that the Czech legions were no longer to fight, but to prepare for being brought back home. The orders were more easily given than carried out. England, the only Ally capable of supplying ships for their transport, refused to do so. The legions had to stay until all the Allied troops were recalled in the spring of 1919. They were finally brought home by British ships at the end of the year.

On 24th September, 1919, the Peace Treaty was signed, and Benes returned home after an absence of four years.

As soon as he got back to Prague Benes set to work without delay to regulate the relationships between Czechoslovakia and her neighbours. He first turned his attention to

Austria. Here his task was made easier by the economic crisis in Austria and by the fact that the new Government of Austria was also a left-democratic one, determined to prevent any return of the old order of things. From 10th to 13th January, the Chancellor of Austria, Reuner, stayed in Prague as an official guest, and discussed mutual problems with Benes. On 17th June the treaty of Brünn was signed, which dealt with actual problems between the two States, such as communications, citizenship and protection of minorities. In August further conversations took place, at which the question of the Hapsburgs was discussed, and as a result of which Czechoslovakia unreservedly supported Austria's acceptance into the League of Nations. The outlook for friendly relations between the two countries was excellent.

Benes was also very eager to establish good and correct relationships with Germany. Germany had been, even before the war, one of the chief buyers of Bohemian produce. On the other hand, Czechoslovakia was also an indispensable market for German manufactures. It was therefore not difficult for Benes, despite the disturbed conditions in Germany, to settle the most important questions between the two countries, particularly in the economic sphere.



With Hungary matters were different. From the very first Hungary refused to accept morally, although forced to accept in fact, the new frontiers assigned to her. Hungary is a feudalistic and reactionary land, and has always had a strong party desirous of finding someone to wear the crown of St. Stephen. The Hungarian Government began a propaganda campaign against her new frontiers and against the succession States, particularly Czechoslovakia, which it waged without ceasing. Benes replied to this propaganda attack by his old method of supplying the Allied ministers with information. The treaty of Trianon, of the 4th June, 1920, rendered harmless the greater part of this propaganda, but it remained impossible to establish friendly relations with Hungary. The Budapest Government was not ready even to enter into the question of economic relations, despite the fact that Hungary's economic position was desperate, and the regulation of trade between the two countries could only have been in her own interests. Hungary was a source of constant danger to the new State and her *putsches* and attempted Hapsburg restorations a constantly disturbing factor in Central Europe. Abandoning therefore all attempts at reconciliation, Benes turned to the policy of defensive alliances, out of which grew the ' Little

Entente.' The Little Entente is often talked of as the creation of France. Actually it was Benes' idea, and it was Benes who brought it into being. He first opened up negotiations with Belgrade, at the end of which a defensive pact was signed by Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, on 14th August, by which each party was obliged to come to the help of the other in case of an unprovoked attack on the part of Hungary. From Belgrade he proceeded to Bucharest, where on 16th August a similar Protocol was published between Czechoslovakia and Rumania. These actions received welcome support in the agreement arrived at between Italy and Yugoslavia on the 12th November, regarding anti-Hapsburg policy.

There remained the very difficult dispute with Poland over the Tesen district. Preparations for a plebiscite inflamed passions to such an extent that friendship between the two countries was in great danger of being turned into acute enmity. On the 10th of July, while Poland was fighting against the Bolsheviks, Benes met the Polish Prime Minister, Grabski, at Spa, and the two arranged a friendly compromise, which was accepted and confirmed by the Ambassadors' Conference on the 28th July. Thus was the path to a gradual renewal of the previously friendly relations to Poland laid open.

In this same year Benes' importance and capabilities as an international statesman received signal recognition. The League of Nations, in which Benes had taken a vivid interest, was called into being, and Benes was elected as one of the six vice-presidents.

Thus we see Benes still the guiding genius of the State, in the creation of which he was such an important factor. It must be repeated that it would be impossible to give a detailed account of all his diplomatic activities in this book. Enough has been said to give an idea of the methods he used, and of his chief lines of policy. The League of Nations he regarded as the greatest hope for peace and security in Europe, and devoted a great deal of his time and energy to its work. His efforts were recognised, and apart from being member of the permanent presidential council, he was chairman of a large number of special committees. But Benes was too much of a realist to rely solely on an institution which was still in its infancy, and having many imperfections and weak points. His second line of defence was to cultivate friendly relations with his neighbours. This being not altogether possible, he prepared a third line in the form of the Little Entente, which he engendered and carefully fostered throughout his term of office. His capacity

for work remained undiminished. There is no statesman in Europe who has worked so hard and so continuously as Benes. There was not a conference, not a movement in the political life of Europe in which Benes had not a hand. And always he studied all the material connected with each case thoroughly beforehand. He was thoroughly democratic, too, in his methods. No statesman was ever more accessible to the Press. He never refused an interviewer, and himself continued to contribute articles to the European Press. All his actions were explained and justified in detail before the Czechoslovak Parliament. He read them long exposés on every major European issue. He went farther than that. Not only was Parliament taken completely into his confidence, but so, as far as was humanly possible, was the whole of the Czech nation. It was a principle of Benes always to have at least the majority of the nation behind him in every step he took. On all the problems which affected every member of the nation, he tried to find out the opinion of the nation as a whole before he took action. And always Benes consulted his President. Masaryk was still his trusted leader. All Benes' actions were taken in complete and absolute agreement with Masaryk. When

abroad, he kept Masaryk telegraphically informed of his every step, and on his return to Prague, the first person he went to see was Masaryk.

## PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC

WE have in the above pages followed the chief steps in the development of Eduard Benes from the peasant boy in Kozlany to the brilliantly successful European statesman. We have seen how for more than thirty years, ever since his student days at the university, he has devoted himself body and soul to the service of his people and his country. We have seen how his work grew in importance and success from year to year. Before the war he had already made a name for himself by his journalism and his scientific publications, among those who were working for a better future for the Czech people. During the war he became the organiser of the revolution at home and abroad, and he had borne the whole burden of all the political and diplomatic work that preceded in Western Europe the re-birth of the Czechoslovak State. He created the Czechoslovak Army, and Czechoslovak Foreign

Policy. He stands with Masaryk as the creator of Czechoslovakia.

The gratitude that the whole nation felt towards him was given expression in a resolution passed by the Czech Cabinet on the 31st October, 1918: "The names of Thomas S. Masaryk, Milan Stefanik, Eduard Benes, and all their associates and helpers are engraved by a grateful nation in their hearts, and history inscribes them in letters of brass on the most glorious rolls of honour in the story of the nation."

Benes' prodigious war-time work was followed by seventeen years of intensive and varied labour as director of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy. The Peace Conference, the delineating of the frontiers of the State, the whole system of alliances with the Little Entente, with France, and with Russia, which ensured the safety of Czechoslovakia through a period of European crisis, are all bound up with the name of Benes. His name is bound up with every constructive movement in the life of the State. Outside his own frontiers his work for all those international organisations which had as their object the safeguarding of the peace and future of Europe and mankind was widely appreciated. No better illustration could be found of the reputation which Benes had earned for himself in the world of international

politics than the fact that, when the League was passing through its severest crisis, as a result of the Italo-Abyssinian conflict, Benes was elected President of the League meeting.

But no one knew better than Masaryk the value of Benes' work. He had first recognised Benes' latent abilities when the young man had come to him in Prague in the first year of the war. He had then left him in charge before he left for Switzerland, and again when Masaryk had to leave negotiations in the West and go to Russia, he left everything in Benes' hands. All along Masaryk had marked Benes out as his successor and spiritual heir. When Benes went to see him at Oxford in 1916, he had expressly stated that, in the event of his death, Benes was to be regarded as his successor. When the Czechoslovak Constitution was drawn up, the age limits for candidature for the Presidency were fixed so that Benes' candidature would be admissible, at the wish of President Masaryk. In 1935 the old President found the burden of office too heavy for his aged shoulders, and his choice of a successor remained the same. During all these years his trust and confidence had never been shaken but rather increased. On the 14th December, 1935, Dr. Samal, as Chancellor, read the following proclamation to both houses of the Czechoslovak Parliament :

"The office of president is difficult and responsible, and therefore requires a man's full powers. I see that I am no more equal to it, and I therefore resign my office. I have been four times elected President of our Republic ; perhaps this gives me the right to ask you, the whole Czechoslovak Nation, and you fellow-citizens of other nationality, to bear in mind, in the ruling of your State, that States are maintained by the ideals through which they came into being. I myself was always aware of this. We need sound policy abroad, and at home, justice for all citizens, to whatever nationality they may belong. I should like further to say that I recommend to you as my successor Dr. Benes. I have worked with him at home and abroad, and I know him. I have complete confidence that all will be well, and shall, God willing, still for a while look on and see how you manage things. I beg you, Mr. Prime Minister, to accept my resignation, and take the necessary steps." On the 18th December, the President's wish was fulfilled and the National Assembly elected Dr. Benes as President of the Republic with the enormous majority of 340 votes to 24.

These figures show that Benes was elected, not by a political party, but by the whole nation. And not only Czechoslovak votes were cast for him, all the Hungarian M.P.s and



Senators voted for him, and a considerable part of the German ; the rest refrained from voting. Not a single vote was cast against him even by the representatives of the minorities. This was a sign, not only of the growing homogeneity of the State, but also of the wish of the country that Masaryk's spirit should live on.

When he took over his office on 18th December, 1935, the new President told his staff that he did so " in the old tradition and a new tempo." And, indeed, Benes' first year of office showed that as President he was going to put as much energy and drive into his new work as into his old. He quickly showed that he was intending to try to be President of *all* people in the Republic, and not of any one party, or even nationality. His interest in Czechoslovakia's foreign policy naturally continued keen, and also in the Army, of which he was now Commander-in-Chief. But the side of national life to which he devoted most care and anxiety, was the problem of the minorities, and of their reconciliation. It is ironic that just this problem in a very short time was to bring about the dismemberment of the State he had so largely helped to create ; and his own personal downfall. Most emphatically it was no lack of effort and goodwill on his part. The pains he took to create unity in the State

are almost incredible. And it seemed, at one time, that his work must be crowned with success. The proof that it was not is only too recent, and its details only too well known.

## THE ACHILLES HEEL

THE German minority in Czechoslovakia was included in that country very much against its will, and much more loudly and insistently than any other minority in the Republic, it has never ceased to say so. This is not the place to discuss the juridical and ethical merits of the struggle. We wish only to trace how this forced inclusion of the Germans of North Bohemia ruined the carefully built-up State of Benes and has now turned him out of office.

It is frequently stated at the present time, that the desire of those Germans, now generally referred to as the Sudeten Germans, who were, by the Treaty of Versailles, placed within the frontiers of the Czechoslovak State, to return to the Reich was born only after, and under the influence of Hitler. This is not an accurate description of the state of affairs. German Bohemia may well be called the cradle

of Nazism. Here, in the last century, were the men who preached the doctrine of pan-Germanism, and called upon Germans to turn away from the heterogeneous Empire to the German Fatherland.

The inclusion of the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia was accomplished in the first place by a diplomatic ruse. Dr. Bauer, the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, sent to the Allied Powers a protest against the inclusion of the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia. He appealed to President Wilson for a Plebiscite to be held. Benes displayed all his terrifying energy. The French had already accepted the 'historical lands' frontier in principle. The English were less ready to agree, but yielded to Benes' arguments that a strong power was needed to stand up to the rising tide of Bolshevism in the surrounding countries, and that it was impossible for Czechoslovakia to organise her economic life while her boundaries were still fluid. The Americans were the most stubborn, but were eventually won over by Benes' bland explanation that these frontiers were, after all, only provisional—nobody knew better than Benes how difficult such 'provisional' arrangements are to alter subsequently. In the atmosphere of 'War Guilt' and determination to crush Germany which so

largely prevailed at Versailles, the frontiers were confirmed without question.

The Sudeten Germans naturally felt resentful, and their hostility to the country of which they now formed part, was not lessened by the treatment they met with. The Czechs had been made to feel themselves a second-class people for many generations, and none but a very few exceptional Czechs like Masaryk and Benes himself could resist the temptation of 'getting their own back.' Undoubtedly grave errors in tact and stupid aggravations, of no serious character, but likely to create ill feeling were committed during the first few years of the Republic's history and intense bitterness was created. Benes himself was by no means responsible for this 'pin-prick' policy, but he could not attend to every detail of administration. Benes' whole policy, on the contrary, as we have seen was conciliation. Unfortunately, popular as Benes was, and great as was his influence, he could not have everything his own way. One of the arguments he had used when the question of the Sudeten Germans was under discussion at Versailles, was a vague promise that Czechoslovakia should be modelled something after the Swiss pattern with autonomous cantons. This he was, in practice, never able to carry out; indeed, it is doubtful whether he ever

made, until very recently, any serious efforts to do so.

For a time it seemed that Benes' strivings after reconciliation between the two peoples might after all meet with success, but the arrival of Hitler to power was the beginning of the end. Benes himself in his Christmas message to his people in 1936, describes the incidents of the 7th March of that year, when Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland and denounced the Treaty of Locarno, as "the most critical moment of the year, 1936, for a European war might indeed have broken out. The authoritative régimes in Europe thus strengthened their power and readiness for action, and emphasised the success in their case of their political ideology and doctrine." As we know, critical moment succeeded critical moment, and Hitler marched from triumph to triumph.

The effect of this on the Sudeten Germans can well be imagined. A Bohemian Nazi party was early formed under the leadership of Henlein, a teacher of gymnastics in a secondary school. The party was suppressed and declared illegal, but was recreated under the title of the Sudeten Deutsche Partei (Sudeten German Party). This party grew more and more open in the declaration of its

aims, and the Czechoslovak Government more and more powerless to do anything to check its progress. The march into Austria and the successful, if forcible, carrying out of the long-planned Anschluss, made the position still more tense—so tense that on 21st May, 1938, war was only narrowly avoided. Movements of German troops on their frontiers caused the Czechs to believe that their turn had come, and a mobilisation order was given in Czechoslovakia. The threat was averted, but only for a short while.

The demands of the Sudeten Deutsche Partei became more and more outrageous, until it was obvious to the most optimistic and the most conciliatory, that they did not want to settle with the Czechoslovak Government. On the 24th April, at Carlsbad, Henlein made his famous speech in which he stated the demands of the Henlein party. They were as follows :

- (1) Full equality of status between Czechs and Germans.
- (2) Recognition of the Sudeten German ethnic group as a legal personality.
- (3) Determination and legal recognition of the German territory.
- (4) Full self-government for the German territory, including all sides of public

life, in so far as the interests of the Germans are concerned.

- (5) Legal protection for every citizen living outside the territory of his own nationality.
- (6) The removal of and reparation on all injustices committed since 1918.
- (7) Recognition of the principle that there should be only German officials in German areas.
- (8) Full liberty to confess German nationality and German political philosophy.

He also demanded that Czech policy be revised in three directions: The 'historical myth' of the Czechoslovak race, must be revised, the policy of making Czechoslovakia a bulwark against Germany, and Czechoslovakia's foreign policy.

The last three points, the revision claims, were almost a personal attack on Benes, as the three points were as we have seen, the cardinal points in his whole political faith and struggle. This explains the personal animosity which Hitler in his wireless speeches revealed towards Benes. Benes' personality had played the most important part in shaping Central Europe after the war, and Benes stood for the new order created by the Peace Treaties and the League of Nations. Hitler

was diametrically opposed to it all. Night after night the German wireless thundered the most astonishing attacks on Benes and his colleagues. Feverish attempts were made in Prague to grant concessions to the Germans, which would yet preserve peace. They knew in their hearts it was useless. The end was approaching when Great Britain and France brought pressure on the Czechoslovak Government to accept Hitler's demands. Benes made his last public bow : in a speech heartrending to listen to, he told his people, the country he had created, that they must submit without struggle to the dismemberment of their State. One of the conditions on which Hitler insisted was the deposition of Benes. Benes resigned. He wished to spare his crushed and broken nation the ignominy of having to depose their own President.

The clock has gone right round to 1914. The professor has again gone back to his professorship. Maybe that in the Golden West, among his university students, some of the bitterness of these last few days will gradually be wiped away.



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